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["WELL! YOUR FATHER'S PEOPLE WILL NEVER SEEK YOU, ALWYNNE, AND I SHOULD ADVISE YOU NEVER TO SEEK THEM!" SAID MRS. BRABANTE.]

## A GIRL'S HEART.

### CHAPTER VII.

ALWYNNE was standing exactly where her mother had left her, when the door opened, and Marie came in, bearing a note in her hand.

"From Madam," she said, putting it on the table, and eyeing the girl carefully and tenderly.

"Alwynne turned slowly round.

"Is my mother gone out?" she asked, and her voice sounded hollow and faint.

It seemed to her only a moment that she had been left there standing bewildered, yet acutely conscious.

Marie answered that Madame had just gone. She went about the room putting away one or two things, apparently quite unobservant of Alwynne's white face and silence, yet seeing and hearing everything only too clearly.

The girl stood on, not touching the letter. Her eyes went over the park that stretched before the hotel. The rain was still falling;

the budding trees seemed to glisten with the wet; the pavements reflected the passers-by; the mud ran in rivulets beside the curb. It was a cheerless scene, and the depression in it made Alwynne shiver.

She looked round suddenly as the rustle of silk broke on her ear. Marie had opened a wardrobe, and had taken down an exquisite gown of white.

"Madame desired me to alter the pleat at the back, before mam'selle wore it to-night!" Marie explained, in answer to the girl's inquiring eyes.

She spoke in French as usual.

Alwynne nodded her head, and Marie went away bearing the dress delicately in her large brown hands.

Left alone again Alwynne gave a sigh. She threw off her cloak and hat, and sat down by the table, and took up her mother's letter. An almost unconscious sneer curled her lip for the moment. She knew the contents of this note so well without troubling to open it. It was not a common occurrence for Mrs. Brabante to communicate with her daughter in this way, but the discussion of a short

while before had been the first of its kind between them, and the girl understood the woman more thoroughly than, under ordinary circumstances, she would have done.

Alwynne opened the envelope, and unfolded the paper slowly.

"Mamma was not in earnest," she said to herself. "She meant nothing she said. I am in real earnest—that is the difference between us."

Mrs. Brabante wrote a magnificent hand—large, bold, characteristic.

"My dear Alwynne," her note said, "I am extremely grieved at what has just passed. It is a sorrowful thing, indeed, when a mother and child are little in sympathy. Quarrels are at all times regrettable; under certain circumstances they are unseemly.

"The discussion of this afternoon has brought me pain, surprise, and some indignation. Were you anything other than the child you are I should feel compelled to adopt some drastic and unpleasant methods of dealing with you; but it is always a useless and foolish task to grow angry with a child, and so, I dismiss all your extraordinary remarks,

and shall endeavour to forget them as quickly as possible.

"Our good and kind friend, Sir Henry Graham, will honour us with his company at dinner this evening, and by escorting us later to the theatre. I do not think it will be necessary for me to require that my daughter will conduct herself towards this gentleman in a manner that her dignity and her gratitude demands.

"As for the folly about your refusal to be presented I have dismissed that also, and I shall this afternoon make arrangements with White for you to be fitted for your frock for the first time to-morrow. I would advise you to recline a little now, and try to soothe your nerves. Do not read when lying down; it is most injurious to the eyes in every way. Let Marie dress your hair in a simple fashion, and try, my dear Alwynne, to control your disagreeable temper as much as possible. This is a duty you owe to yourself and to me; for though you do not often trouble yourself with remembering it, the fact remains that I am your mother, after all, and I do not think I have ever acted towards you save in the best and most thoughtful way.

"I do not see how I merit such conduct as I received from you to-day, but no doubt the childish ebullition of temper which tempted you to so forget yourself is a thing of the past, and you are now as eager to dismiss the painful scene from your mind as I am eager that it should so be dismissed—Your affectionate mother,

"LOUISA BRABANTE."

Alwynne read this letter through quietly twice, then laid it on the table, and sat gazing at it.

Her young face was clouded with an expression that seemed full of every sad emotion—her young heart beat sorrowfully in her breast.

It was the utter selfishness of her mother that hurt her most at this moment—the utter lack of sympathy which she deplored. She seemed to realise all at once, in its most bitter completeness, that were she and her mother to be together a whole century there could never come a warmer or better understanding between them.

Alwynne could read her mother's iron determination beneath the specious affection of this note. No matter what her child's feelings might be, she would carry out her own desires, and live according to her own pleasure.

Alwynne shuddered as she sat there in the luxurious hotel room, surrounded on every side by the outside evidences of all that is supposed to make life liveable, yet bearing in her young heart the burden of unutterable desolation and misery. The very splendour that was about her hurt her to-day in a vague, yet a sufficiently definite manner. She said, passionately to herself, she would rather be starving in some garret with a mother whom she could love and revere—a mother who loved and revered her—than spend the rest of her life in the luxury that had always been her dainty lot.

She sat there in the twilight, for the gloomy afternoon darkened quickly as she pictured the future before her in this great London world.

She could see the future so clearly—experience had given her a sense of presence that was remarkable.

She could follow their path quite easily. All the old manoeuvres, the old tricks, the old ways that had embittered her young existence—the social difficulties, the well-bred coldness that would be vouchsafed to two unknown women, the jealousy that would follow on the admiration. She, Alwynne, would receive the transparent ruses which her mother would resort to. The old story of scenes and anger, when the proposal so eagerly desired had been quietly dismissed—yes, the old story a little more painful to soon when there would be the possibility of meeting him at every turn. But for him Alwynne might have struggled on a little

longer, have borne with the burden of her life, have submitted to be misunderstood, to have her best and purest feelings jarred and wounded at every turn; but for him things might have been just the same.

But Alwynne, though no coward, was not strong or brave enough to support even the thought of meeting this man at every turn.

She dreaded it for more than one reason. She knew that he had accepted her answer with no sense of permitting it to assume a hopeless aspect to him.

He had not presumed to speak a single word when she had given him her answer coldly—absolutely.

He had merely bent his head, and turned away without even touching her hand; but he had looked into her eyes as he went, and that look had spoken more than any words could have done.

It seemed to say that he would not relinquish her without a great struggle, and that though he bowed to her dismissal this time he would but wait his opportunity, and then—

Alwynne covered her face with her hands. She dared not let herself think of the pain, the horrible pain, that must come to her, then. Now more than ever was the question of a union between Hugo Earl of Taunton and Torre and herself, Alwynne Brabante, an absolute impossibility.

She had sent him from her on the ship as much from a feeling of pride and maiden modesty and dignity as for any other reason. The social difference between them had, of course, a place in her thoughts, but it had only been in the last few hours that a horrible and vague doubt was becoming a more horrible conviction.

Somehow—how she could scarcely have told—her mother's letter carried weight to this conviction—to the conviction that to add to all the rest of her troubled reflections was the big one that she and her mother were sailing under false colours, living all the time a great, great lie—seeming to be what they had no right to be.

Alwynne's heart began to beat quickly as thought followed on thought. Mixed with her growing misery was a surprise that she should have never questioned this matter before. She was enough of the world, now alas! to know to see how open the matter was to such questions. On all hands, on every side, the people she met had family connections—some, many, indeed, belonging to them. She could not remember a single instance from her happy, happy schooldays up to now, when she had met a single individual who was as destitute as she and her mother of family relations.

At school every girl had seemed to be surrounded by such ties. Alwynne had never missed them then there; for, apart from her comrades' love, the explanation of having lived and hailing always from a foreign country, had much to do with encouraging this feeling; but now—now looking back, Alwynne wondered, with a pang, how even then she could have been so blind, how it was she could not have seen the difference between the other girls and herself!

It was like recalling a burst of sunshine, the remembrance of those days! How happy she had been, and how much love and sympathy she had received!

The sunshine vanished suddenly, a chill, dark gloom came in its stead. The girl sat with clenched, cold hands, thinking—thinking! A veil seemed to be rolling away! Why was it that everything that was painful came crowding into her mind? As she sat there, conviction forcing its chill fingers on her heart, she seemed to know all at once why it was that her schoolfriend's affection had not outlived her schooldays. Now, all seemed to grow clear—that chance meeting with Honorine Delmonte in Canada, and the pain and mystification that had followed on that meeting.

Alwynne had never understood why Honorine never came to call at her hotel—why

her mother paid no attention to Mrs. Brabante; why, when they met in the street, Honorine would bow hurriedly, and seem as though she did not wish to see the girl who had been her chosen comrade and confidante in the old pension home. She had been too proud to speak of this to her mother; indeed, by that time she had learnt the truth of her position with her mother, and had already taught herself reticence and repression. She had been deeply hurt by Honorine's coldness and forgetfulness, and if her pride had not been so great she might have gone to her old school friend, and asked simply and straightforward the reason for such a change.

Fortunately Alwynne's proud spirit came to her rescue, and supported her in this, as in all her other disappointments. She tried to dismiss Honorine from her memory, if this was her idea of friendship. Then to Alwynne she existed no longer; but, nevertheless, she had wearied herself with conjecture as to the cause of this strange behaviour on the part of one whom she had imagined had loved her, and never until to-day had even a shadow of the truth come into her mind.

As she sat there, growing more pallid each moment, the mystery faded into nothing—the truth was revealed.

"It was because of something—some disgrace—some awful stain upon us! Honorine must have known. They—they would not let her come to me—that is why she always turned so white when we met. I remember one day, there were tears in her eyes, for she used to love me. Poor Honorine, it must have hurt her to hurt me! She did not know that I would not understand."

She passed one cold hand over her eyes—her head and throat were burning as with fever. She suffered now as she had never known it was possible for a human creature to suffer. Scenes and memories returned to her, all bearing some small trait to make up the whole. The curiosity awakened always by her handsome mother, the sometimes unpleasant familiarity of manner adopted by men whom they met travelling, the veiled amusement and surprise that sometimes mingled in the admiration she excited by her fresh young loveliness—all was explained to her agitated mind. She seemed to know why she had always shrunk from the thought of mingling in any great social world. It must have been the silent voice of nature that spoke within her heart, to warn her pure, proud spirit against the trials, the horrors attendant on such a step.

The future her mother desired for her in this great cruel London, suddenly grew black and awful to her. If Honorine, her girl-friend, her bosom companion, if she had turned away from her, neither seeing nor knowing her, how could she expect mercy or even kindness from a world of strangers?

She started and shivered as the door opened, and Marie re-entered, the white gown lying lightly on her arm.

The maid glanced at the silent figure just discernable in the dusk, and spoke as she put the gown carefully on the bed.

"It grows late, madame. Shall I not light the gas? Madame is already returned."

Alwynne made no reply.

Marie moved to and fro uncertainly for a moment, and then struck a match.

Her questions died unuttered on her lips as she read the girl's face clearly; the volubility that was so much a part of her gave way to the fact that was born of her tender love for this girl.

"It is something very bad this time—something greater than usual!" she thought to herself, while she moved about the room preparing everything Alwynne would need for her evening toilette. "It has seemed harder with her of late, since he came!" for Marie had not been blind, and Lord Taunton's attentions had been as evident to her as to Mrs. Brabante.

Marie had no real knowledge of what had happened, only she felt sure that the present



shadow on her dear one's face was occasioned in some way by this man.

"I go to Madame now—I return immediately," she said, softly, as she passed out; and her big, brown hand went tenderly towards the slender figure, as though it would have lain a moment on the beautiful bowed head.

She closed the door softly, and Alwynne gave a hurried sigh—a sigh that was drawn from her very heart of hearts!

"I must know the truth!" she said to herself. "I must know the whole, the absolute, truth! Know it to-night! now—at once!"

The burden of silent endurance, of struggling against this indefinite yet invincible enemy, was too much for her. She must have the voice of fact to finish the conviction. There was not a grain of doubt that this fact would be given her—not a glimmer of hope that she might be mistaken.

She knew she was not mistaken. She was prepared for the worst; she only wondered how it was she had lived so long without having arrived at this state of mind before.

She walked to one of the windows, pulled up the blind, and pushed up one of the panes.

The damp, cold air was refreshing; but the desolation of the world outside struck on her anew.

She felt an awful weariness and hopelessness of life upon her in this moment—a sensation that in after days she had never been able to describe, even to herself in remembrance.

She turned suddenly, and walked from the room.

Her mother was located a few doors away. She knocked, waited for the clear voice to give her admittance, and then turned the handle.

Mrs. Brabante was almost dressed for dinner. Her blue velvet gown was receiving a few finishing touches from Marie's deft fingers, and she herself was putting one or two small, yet exquisite jewels amid the priceless lace that surrounded her handsome neck.

She frowned as she caught sight of Alwynne's figure in the mirror.

"Not ready, Alwynne! You will be very late!" she said, sharply. "Marie is just done with me. We have only eighteen minutes before Lady Marbury and Sir Henry arrive!"

Alwynne came deliberately up to the table. She looked wan, almost old, in the brilliant light.

Her hair was pushed back from her brow. She had a strained expression in the eyes and round the mouth that told of intense pain, either bodily or mental.

"Send Marie away. I wish to speak to you!" she said, in a low voice, that was as deliberate as her movement had been.

Mrs. Brabante turned a trifle pale. There was that about her child's bearing that was neither pleasant nor easy for her to endure in this moment.

She dismissed Marie abruptly, telling her to return and get everything ready immediately for Alwynne; and then, as they were alone, she looked steadily into her daughter's beautiful, miserable eyes.

"Well?" she said, coldly. "What have you to say? What is the meaning of this extraordinary, this theatrical behavior? Upon my word, Alwynne, you almost alarm me! You are acting to-day as though you had some brain disorder! I do not understand nor like it!"

Alwynne paused a moment. Her heart was beating to suffocation in her breast. It seemed to rise in her throat and choke down the words that were hovering on her lips, the words that were burning and searing her very soul, as it were; the words that must be spoken before another hour, another moment, was gone—the most bitter words for any child to utter to its mother!

## CHAPTER VIII.

Mrs. Brabante turned round and faced her daughter, magnificent in her matured beauty—

a queen with her regal bearing, and the imperious carriage of her well-poised head.

"Well, Alwynne, I am ready to hear what you have to say; but please make haste. Time flies, you know. You have now only fifteen minutes before Lady Marbury arrives. I don't suppose Sir Henry will escort her, although, of course, he may do so. In any case, you know he is never unpunctual."

The girl threw out her hands with a sort of desperate agony. She forced her voice from her aching throat.

"Mother, mother!" she said, and the notes of her usually clear, sweet voice were husky and strained. "Mother! What are we? What right have we? Who am I? Who—what was my father? I—I must know—I must know!"

Mrs. Brabante had turned as white as the marble of the toilette-table, upon which one of her shapely hands was now leaning with such force that the veins rose large and dark beneath the white skin.

She looked at the girl deliberately.

"You—are mad!" she said, speaking as calmly as she could. "Mad or ill! What is it—have you a fever? You must be delirious. Go back to your room. Go to bed, I will send for—"

Alwynne put out her cold hand.

"I am neither mad nor ill," she said, and the strength of determination was in her voice now. "I am neither mad nor ill, mother, and you know it. If I have been mad at all it has been in the past—in these last three miserable years that we have spent together, you and I alone!"

Mrs. Brabante's face changed suddenly; a dull red flush mounted to her brow, her cold, hard eyes grew brilliant. She looked at the girl as though she could have struck her to the ground.

"How dare you! How dare you speak to me like this! Do you forget I am your mother?"

Alwynne shivered. She had her two hands tight clasped together.

"Forget it? No, no, no!" she cried, passionately. "Do I ever forget it! Through all my pain, through all my misery, I have never forgotten this. I would have loved you always, as I did three years ago, but—but you would not have my love; you cast it from you, you—"

Mrs. Brabante repeated her words.

"Pain! misery! Pain! misery! and you stand there and dare to say these things—you, who have had so much? Think—think what your life is? Contrast it if you can with a thousand other girls of your own age. See what you have had more than these others. There is nothing in the world you cannot have if you choose to ask for it, you—"

The girl broke in hurriedly, passionately.

"Then," she said, with a sort of fierce determination in her voice, "then I will ask now for that I have longed for all these months past. It has never come to me definitely until to-night, but it has been there all the time, gnawing my heart, as it were, fretting my pride, sapping my enjoyment. Mother! mother!" with a cry of agony, "you can give me diamonds! There is nothing, as you say yourself, you cannot give me if I ask for it! Give me, then, the answer I ask for now. Tell me I am mad, if you will, only let me know the truth. It is this sham that is killing me, this false life, with a shadow always in the background that makes me what I am. I know," she pale lips faltered, "I know, though I have so much more than other girls, that I—I—lack something. These other girls have something I shall never have, perhaps. I do not want to hurt you, mother. I—I—ask your pardon, your forgiveness for anything that may hurt you in my words. I do not want to look into the past. I only want to know the truth, to set my mind at rest, to see a clearer path in the future!"

The voice paused, broken by exhaustion, by emotion. Mrs. Brabante stood in the same pose, her magnificent figure drawn to its full

height, the diamonds and rubies gleaming and glinting amid the soft lace on her breast.

There was a hard grim, bitter look disfiguring the almost perfect beauty of her oval face. She had the air of some magnificent statue. There was not a gleam of womanliness about her figure or countenance.

She broke the silence that followed on Alwynne's speech by a short laugh—curl, hard, cruel.

"You have strange ideas of things, certainly."

"I do not wish to hurt you, mother"—in one and the same breath—"with most horrible, most insulting of questions. Your nature is a noble one, indeed! There is no thought of insult in my mind, mother," the girl said, feebly yet with dignity. "You—will not see. You will not understand me. It is always the same." There were unshed tears in the beautiful eyes, a wan agony on the beautiful face.

"How pitiful is ingratitude!" the older woman said, suddenly, bitterly. "Oh, Heaven! had I had your life when I was a girl! You have never known work and struggle, poverty—ay, sometimes even starvation. You have had no toil, no miserable dragging on from day to day. From your cradle you have had luxury. Your path in life has been strewn with roses—while mine was—" the words ended with a gesture. Then after an instant's pause the woman spoke again—spoke with another bitter laugh, "Well, there is an old adage that sin will find one out, and so my punishment must come sooner or later. It has come through you!"

Alwynne put out her little hand. There was a sound in her mother's voice she had never heard before. It touched her to the quick of her tender young heart.

"Mother—mother!" she said, brokenly, pleadingly.

But Mrs. Brabante turned away deliberately. She bent her stately head over her jewelled watch.

"Five minutes to the half-hour." She shrugged her shoulders. "Well, my answer to your request can be conveyed in the space of two of those minutes." She raised herself with her usual imperious bearing. "You wish to know—what we are, what position we hold—and what our proper status is? You shall know all this. If the truth be unpleasantable you must blame your own folly and curiosity for prompting you to inquire too deeply into that which was never intended for your knowledge. You seem to be under the impression that we are living a sham life—a life we have no definite claim to. Practically, I suppose you are right. We are shams—both of us."

Alwynne shivered under the cold, calm merciless voice and manner.

"In this world of fashion and rank we have distinctly no place. My name is not Brabante, neither is yours."

"The only name to which I fancy you have any real or legal claim would be that which I used to own before—before I met your father. I don't suppose you will care to assume it, so there will be no necessity to tell you of it now, or of the earlier events of my life. Time is short, so I will condense matters."

"The money which is a cause of such distress to you is the outcome of my professional career as an actress, and my success in that career. Twenty years ago, Alwynne, the name of Louisa Dalrymple was as well known as the dome of St. Paul's. My artistic path was not a high one." The woman was gazing into the mirror, and put some touches to her hair, as she spoke calmly, collectively, coldly. "I was, in fact, what is known as a music-hall singer, a variety artiste!"

"My voice was never brilliant, my personal attractions were. I was a success. It is not necessary for me to insist exactly in what way. You are sufficiently a woman of the world to understand now that the fortune I inherit and hold was not all the product of my profession. The man whom you treat so

badly is one of the old friends remaining from those old days. Sir Henry has always worshipped me. To-morrow he would make me his wife but for the existence of a Lady Graham already. When she dies, which she may any day, I shall of course occupy her place.

"Are you satisfied. Is there more you want to know? Kith and kin you have not—at least, not to my knowledge. I cut myself adrift from my people years and years ago. While for your father's family—" There was a curious look on the woman's hard, beautiful face, and a ring of something that touched Alwynne's already over-burdened heart, with a fresh pain in the laugh that followed on this pause. "Well, your father's people will never seek you, Alwynne, and I would advise you never to attempt to seek them. They are too proud to forgive a disgrace, even though it be twenty years old, and bears a face like yours." Mrs. Brabante turned and looked at her daughter. "I must go down to meet my guests, but I can give you one more minute. Is there anything more you desire to know?"

She took up her jewelled fan and stood there—imperious, magnificent, callous—waiting for another word from the wan, ashen lips.

Then as Alwynne threw out her hands, with a choking sob of agony in her throat, and turned slowly, blindly to find the door, the woman revolved, and looked once again at her reflections.

"I will come to your room to-morrow morning, Alwynne," she said, calling after the girl in a clear, cold voice. "I will give some sort of excuse to Lady Marbury. I think you will be better in bed. You look almost old to-night. Now you know the real value of your beauty you will be more careful of it, perhaps!"

She stood a moment looking after the girl, frowned fiercely, as she heard Alwynne's door close, then shrugged her shoulders, and smiled as Marie came forward with her wrap, and prepared her to go downstairs.

(To be continued.)

## THE BELLE OF THE SEASON.

### CHAPTER LXVI.—(continued.)

THE EARL reflected that before the next week should have arrived he would probably be possessed of proofs of the fugitive's death, and he granted his wife's request, remarking that the gaiety that would be afforded by a ball was all that was required to quite restore his health, and give the proper tone to his mind.

"And this evening," he added, "if you ladies are disengaged, I shall be happy to escort you to the opera. Our box, you know, is engaged for the season."

Both Lady Geraldine and the Countess were passionately fond of music, and accepted the invitation, while venturing to remonstrate against a premature use of the Earl's newly-recovered strength. His lordship smiled, and declared that he should be quite well by evening, his recovery being always as sudden as his attacks of illness.

Lady Geraldine spent most of the day in her own apartments, but when evening came made her appearance in the drawing-room, looking quite regal in her beautiful evening-dress. The Countess was awaiting her, and stated that the carriage was in waiting, and that the Earl would be down directly.

Even while she was speaking his lordship entered the room, looking much better than his wife had expected, in full evening dress, and he escorted the ladies to the carriage.

As they descended the steps of the mansion, the full light in the corridor behind them revealed their persons distinctly, and they were not unseen.

At a little distance from the mansion stood a well and fashionably-attired gentleman, lean-

ing upon a walking-stick. There was nothing remarkable in his appearance, his hair and long whiskers being of the fashionable colour, and curled, and his dress being very quiet, and there was nothing singular in the fact that as he was approaching the mansion he paused to notice the egress of its inmates.

And yet that well-dressed, quiet gentleman was no other than the mysterious fugitive.

With the money given him by Parkin he had purchased his present attire and disguise, and had, with many changes of cabs, come to the vicinity of the Earl of Montford's residence for the purpose of dropping into a letter-box his note to Walter.

What other motive had actuated him in coming to this particular spot remains to be seen.

The fearful, frightened look that had hitherto characterised him had altogether disappeared. His countenance wore an expression of coolness, calmness, and self-reliance. His eyes had a look of determination and courage, and his bearing was full of resolution and self-possession.

That he was still weak was evinced by the fact that he leaned rather heavily upon his cane; but he was stronger than might have been expected, considering his recent attack of fever.

He looked a little surprised when the door of the mansion was flung open, and the Countess, robed in a dress of silken tissue, scarlet in hue, contrasting with her swarthy complexion, swept down the marble steps and was assisted into the carriage by an obsequious footman.

But when the radiant Geraldine, with her white opera-cloak falling accidentally from her snowy shoulders, followed the Countess, the fugitive breathed hard, setting his teeth firmly together to prevent the utterance of a sound, and tightened his grasp upon his walking-stick. There were sudden tears in his eyes as they rested upon her glowing beauty, and his lips quivered with strong emotion, showing that his being was stirred to its very depths.

A moment later and the Earl descended the steps, and at the sight of him the other's countenance grew stern and hard, and his lips acquired an almost fierce expression.

The Earl stepped into the carriage, gave the order to the footman, in a tone sufficiently loud to be heard by the observer, and the vehicle then whirled away with its living freight.

For a moment or two the watcher looked after it, and then he resumed his walk, passing the mansion with an unusual stateliness of bearing.

He had scarcely passed it when he encountered an individual who seemed to be strolling up and down the street while waiting to be joined by a friend.

This person he recognised as one of Dr. Mure's keepers—the same one who had accompanied him to Walter's chambers. He was the one stationed by the doctor in the vicinity of Montford House, to watch for his charge, should he attempt to effect an entrance there.

As the fugitive recognised this man he became paler, realising that his way was hedged about with perils and difficulties, and that he needed to exercise the utmost caution and circumspection.

But his pallor was his only sign of emotion. The man looked at him keenly, as he looked at every passer-by, but not a muscle of his countenance flinched, and he gave not the slightest token of recognition, but walked carelessly and slowly onward, even twirling his stick as he proceeded, that he might not seem as weak as he really was.

The keeper had no suspicion of his identity, and after his first keen, quick glance, did not look at him again. Still the hunted man did not feel safe until he had placed several streets between himself and Montford House.

"I have seen that my way is not clear," he then mused. "If I proceed as I intended, I shall be taken by Mure and his assistants, who

are on the watch for me. I must arrange another plan. I should like to see her again!" he added. "I had such a brief glimpse of her on her way to the carriage. That keeper failed to recognise me, and I shall be quite safe in following them to the Opera."

Acting upon his impulse, he signalled a passing cab, and was driven to the Opera.

He easily succeeded in obtaining an obscure seat, quite at the back of the house, where he was not likely to be noticed, and from this position he found that he had a very good view of the boxes, several of which were already occupied.

Caring nothing for the music under the pressure of his anxieties, he gave himself up to watching the occupants of the Earl's box, bestowing almost exclusive attention upon Lady Geraldine.

If she had looked radiantly beautiful when passing from her residence to the carriage, she looked far more so now, when sparkling with animation and pleasure.

Her dress looked simple yet very elegant, and her shoulders were now covered with a costly lace, which seemed only to enhance her beauty. A curl or two strayed from her bands of hair, which were ornamented with a magnificent spray of diamonds set to represent flowers. A few ornaments also adorned her arms and throat, but they were scarcely noticed in the splendour of her beauty and loveliness.

The stranger gazed at her like one in a trance, her every movement being noted with a sort of adoring look. Once, as she smiled, in response to a remark from the Countess, he half-opened his arms and started up from his seat, but he remembered himself in time to escape observation from his neighbours.

Noticing that she smiled and bowed to some one in the box opposite her own, he glanced in that direction, and beheld Lady Rosenbury, charming in her mature beauty, accompanied by Raymond, Lord Rosenbury.

He saw that her ladyship, whom he seemed to recognise, greeted Lady Geraldine with a fond smile, and he also saw with what eagerness Lord Rosenbury obtruded himself upon her notice. His greeting was returned by a bow of marked coldness, which seemed to discomfit his lordship, but he appeared reassured when the Earl beckoned him to his box.

After communicating with Lady Rosenbury, Raymond left her, soon after reappearing in the Earl's box, where he seemed to meet with a cordial reception from all except Lady Geraldine.

It was interesting to watch the studied coolness with which the maiden treated Rosenbury, and how little it seemed to affect him, he appearing not even to notice it.

As he watched the scene he seemed to comprehend thoroughly the situation of affairs, and a strange menacing smile rested for a few minutes upon his stern lips.

As he continued to regard Lady Geraldine there seemed to be something magnetic in his gaze, for the maiden moved uneasily, and a look of sadness rested upon her face like a cloud obscuring the splendour of the sun.

And then she turned her head, her gaze wandering over the house, at length resting upon the earnest face that watched her.

As she did so, it seemed to each as if each had experienced a magnetic shock.

Lady Geraldine grew pale and leaned forward, with an eager expression, as if wishing to obtain a better view of the person, and he returned her gaze for one moment and then leaned forward, weeping silently.

For a moment only he gave way to emotion, which to his neighbours seemed, if they noticed it, but the effect of the music, and then he subdued it by a violent effort and lifted his head, a look of triumph in his eyes, and a smile of exultation on his lips!

Geraldine had turned away her gaze on his stooping forward, and when she looked again, impelled by a strange fascination she could not comprehend, the man had left the building.



## CHAPTER XLVII.

How oft the sight of means to do ill deeds,  
Makes deeds ill done! —*Shakespeare.*

WHILE at the opera, Lord Rosenbury had made some complaint to the Earl of Montford in regard to the marked coolness displayed towards him by the Lady Geraldine, and the Earl in reply had invited him to come to Montford House the next morning, at which time the relations between Rosenbury and the maiden should be definitely settled.

Accordingly, the next morning Rosenbury presented himself at the residence of the Earl, and was ushered into the drawing-room, where his lordship was waiting to receive him.

He received a cordial greeting, as usual, and after some preliminary remarks, the Earl said,—

"I have been thinking, my dear Rosenbury, as you suggested last evening, that your position in regard to Geraldine ought to be settled. As the case now stands, you are neither an accepted nor rejected suitor."

"You forget, my lord, that the Lady Geraldine refused me!"

"Ah! that was merely a girlish caprice, long since repented, I daresay. It is true Geraldine still seems to cling to that artist, and forgets entirely how much he is beneath her notice. I cannot comprehend her infatuation, but it appears to me preposterous to think of her really marrying a gardener's son! A little reasoning cannot fail to bring her to her senses!"

What the Earl really thought as he said this would have been matter for doubt.

He knew very well how earnest the girl had been in declaring her intention to marry Walter Loraine; and he knew, also, that she was not one to speak lightly, particularly on a subject so important to her whole future happiness.

But he might have thought that that feeling with her was but evanescent, and that the love of the gay society of which she was the belle would assert a pre-eminent claim over her affections, and cause her eventually to dismiss her artist lover.

He believed that, reared as she had been to appreciate the advantages of rank and wealth, she would shrink when the trial should come from a marriage with a man of supposed humble birth and ignoble relations.

His conclusions showed how little he comprehended the high womanly nature of the Lady Geraldine, or her appreciation of true worth and affection.

Rosenbury, perhaps, understood Geraldine better than did the Earl, or had a keen sense of his own inferiority to the man whose position he had usurped, for a deep shadow clouded his face, and he shook his head gloomily as he responded,—

"I believe she will not give him up easily. I feel positive that your persuasions will only serve to strengthen her love for him, and her aversion for me!"

"Perhaps she regards me as her natural enemy," said the Earl, with an assumed smile. "You know, Rosenbury, that my relations with my niece have been more cold than affectionate, and that she has been accustomed to be guided in all things by her own will and the counsels of Lady Rosenbury. Now, if your mother would only use her influence in your behalf, I am sure Geraldine would reconsider her decision against you."

"Lady Rosenbury will do nothing of the kind!" replied Raymond, despondingly. "She would prefer to use her influence in behalf of Walter Loraine! In fact, my lord," he added, recklessly, "my mother scarcely speaks to me, and seems to have acquired a horror of me. I scarcely ever see her, unless I make my way into her boudoir, and then she turns pale, and looks frightened and indignant. I have grown to be a stranger in my mother's house, and am, therefore, all the more anxious to marry!"

"Can this be possible?" exclaimed the

Earl, in astonishment. "Her ladyship accompanied you to the opera last evening!"

"No; I forced my society upon her!" said Rosenbury, bitterly. "I think she expected Walter Loraine to accompany her; but as he didn't come I took his place, telling her that I merely wished to serve as an escort in order that our unhappy domestic relations might not become food for gossiping tongues. She accepted me as an escort, but did not allow me to touch her hand, and we scarcely exchanged a word after leaving home until our return!"

The Earl's astonishment was increased on hearing this declaration.

The statement, so bitterly made, was true.

Since the revelation of Rosenbury's murderous designs upon Walter's life Lady Rosenbury had been almost unable to bear his presence under the same roof with her.

She had treated him with the most studied coolness; and, on his demanding an explanation of her changed manner, had informed him that she had partially overheard his conversation with Walter, and had arrived at a knowledge of his baseness, and cruelty, and no longer regarded him as her son.

She had also told him that she intended making a will, giving all her disposable property to the artist, and that, when the present town-season ended, all forms of friendship between them must cease for ever.

It will thus be seen she intended discarding him completely.

"Why, my dear Rosenbury," said the Earl, "I never heard of such an unnatural mother in my life! And I always thought that Lady Rosenbury was a model of maternal affection! I supposed so because she was such a devoted wife. Her late husband actually adored her. Can it be possible that she prefers this artist to her own son?"

"She does, my lord. I think she intends making a will in his favour. She has not done so yet, because she's not been well lately."

"Not only prefers this low-born artist to you, but actually going to leave him her fortune?" exclaimed the Earl. "Can her ladyship be in her right mind?"

Rosenbury started, as if his lordship's words contained a valuable suggestion; but the next moment he became despondent again.

"Perhaps, Rosenbury," continued the Earl, thoughtfully, "this artist is a favourite with her ladyship because he so strongly resembles the late Lord Rosenbury. Everybody has noticed the singular likeness. And you do not look in the least like your late father!"

Rosenbury looked embarrassed, and his face flushed, as if the secret of his life were plainly visible on his features, and he stammered,—

"Ah, yes, I have noticed the accidental resemblance of which you speak. That singular likeness to my late father may make a difference in her ladyship's feelings. It reminds her of her beloved husband, you know, my lord. I suppose I resemble my mother's family!"

"Not a bit of it!" declared the Earl. "The Raymonds were a dark-eyed, dark-haired race. You look no more like your mother than like your father, Rosenbury! Are you sure that Loraine's likeness to your late father is accidental?"

Rosenbury started, flushed hotly, and scarcely summoned courage to ejaculate,—

"Sure, my lord!"

"But it must have been," mused the Earl. "The late Lord Rosenbury was devotedly fond of his wife, and, of course, Walter Loraine could not be his son!"

"Of course not!" said the visitor, in a tone that seemed to indicate that his own mind was not made up on the matter.

"But to return to the subject," said the Earl, "of your suit to Geraldine. It is impossible, of course, in these days, my dear Rosenbury, to force a lady into a marriage against her will, and I am sorry for it. The fathers and guardians in the good old days

had a great advantage over their successors. And then my niece, unfortunately, has not a very yielding character, and threats would only arouse her indignation, instead of frightening her into obedience. In short, my dear Rosenbury, we can only set the matter before her, and leave her to act according to her own will. If she has reconsidered her promise to the artist, she may accept you. If she refuses, I can only beg you to have patience and wait a little longer!"

Rosenbury looked greatly annoyed, as he replied,—

"But, my lord, as you gave me authority for so doing, I have hinted at my club that I am engaged to marry your niece, and have received the congratulations of all the fellows. Everybody supposes that I am going to marry the belle of the season. What am I to do if I am again refused? Of course, I shall not relinquish my pretensions to Lady Geraldine's hand so long as you support my claim, but you see that I am likely to receive considerable annoyance, especially if she takes the trouble to contradict the report of our engagement."

"I see, Rosenbury, and quite sympathise with you, but I can do no more than I have said. You are aware that Geraldine's nature is not one that will bear coercion!"

Rosenbury knew this, but he could not help feeling that there was a difference in the Earl's manner, a slight, but perceptible coolness, as if his anxiety to promote the marriage they had planned had decreased.

He wondered if his lordship had found another plan by which to procure money for the payment of his debts, and to extricate himself from his difficulties, and he put the question bluntly.

The Earl replied that he was in as great need as before of the sum that would be granted him by Rosenbury for promoting the marriage, but that a sense of the difficulties in bringing it about acted like a heavy weight upon him.

Rosenbury was by no means satisfied with this explanation, but concealed his chagrin, and asked what the Earl then proposed to do.

"I think you had better see Geraldine," was the response, "and once more make a declaration of your love for her. It is possible that she may have changed her mind since her refusal of your hand! Allow me to summon her!"

Touching a bell, the Earl commanded his page, who responded to the call, to present his compliments to Lady Geraldine, and inform her that he desired her presence in the drawing-room.

In a few minutes the maiden entered the room, and her uncle said,—

"My dear child, Lord Rosenbury has begged to have a few minutes' interview with you, and I desire you for my sake to grant his request!"

He turned to leave the apartment, as the maiden answered, with dignity,—

"Lord Rosenbury can have nothing to say to me in private, uncle. I beg you to remain!"

Affecting not to hear these words, the Earl withdrew, and Rosenbury caught her hand, exclaiming,—

"Geraldine, do hear me! I beg you to reconsider your refusal of my hand! I love you devotedly. I know that I am unworthy—"

"I know, too, that you are unworthy," interposed the Lady Geraldine, with perceptible haughtiness, as she withdrew her hand.

Rosenbury flushed and bit his lip angrily at this reply, and the maiden continued,—

"From what you have already said, Lord Rosenbury, I conclude that you are about to repeat to me your offer of marriage. I consider such an offer from you an insult, and shall treat it with silent contempt."

"An insult," ejaculated her suitor.

The maiden bowed haughtily, and was about to withdraw, when the Earl re-entered the room.

From his opportune return, Geraldine concluded that he had been playing the part of a listener.

"Don't go just yet, my dear niece," he said, blandly. "As I came in, I thought you said something about insults?"

"I suppose you know for what reason Lord Rosenbury desired to see me?"

"Certainly, Geraldine, but I see no insult in an offer of marriage from a gentleman of his lordship's rank and wealth!"

"Then I will not attempt to reason the subject with your lordship," responded the maiden, with a smile that provoked her uncle to wrath. "If you see no insult in a proposal repeated the third time, and after my known engagement to a gentleman—if you see no insult in a proposal at all from a person like his lordship, I cannot, of course, undertake to enlighten you!"

With a bow to the Earl, and without another look at her conscious and crestfallen suitor, the Lady Geraldine glided from the room before a hand could be stretched out to detain her.

"Your lordship has my niece's decision, it seems," said the Earl, with a sarcastic smile. "You are declined, and without thanks!"

Rosenbury was too angry to reply, and the Earl continued, after a pause,—

"Geraldine thinks and feels deeply, my lord, as you have seen, and it will not be a light task to induce her to think differently. Still, time and patience may accomplish anything, and you may win her by a course of devoted and unobtrusive attentions such as your passion for her may suggest. If you could only get this artist out of the way! Bribery would be useless, of course, when he has such a prize in view, but other means might be tried."

He looked at Rosenbury significantly, and his visitor did not fail to comprehend his meaning.

"It would be difficult," answered Raymond, remembering how he failed in his former plan of getting rid of Walter. "I shouldn't like to attempt anything that might be discovered—"

"Said yourself, Rosenbury," said the Earl, hurriedly. "I've said nothing, suggested nothing! Only, you know, if this artist were out of your path, you'd stand a most excellent chance of succeeding him! Geraldine cares nothing for Lord Clair, nor any of her other admirers, and she loves your mother, and might want to become her daughter. Get rid of your rival, and you can have matters all your own way!"

Rosenbury fancied, from the Earl's persistence, that his lordship had a personal motive in urging him to "get rid" of Walter Loraine, beyond the apparent one, but he dismissed the idea as chimerical.

The interview proved anything but satisfactory, the attitude taken by Geraldine being totally different to what had been expected by her uncle or her suitor. The ideas broached by the Earl were laid up in the brain of his visitor for future consideration and use, and he finally departed, brooding upon schemes which would make him the proud husband of the peerless Lady Geraldine!

When Rosenbury had gone, the Earl muttered,—

"That was a good idea of mine to incite Rosenbury to violence against Walter Loraine. As yet, the artist knows nothing of the guest he so strangely took under his care, and it will be well to guard against any suspicions he may conceive when he comes to remember who recommended the nurse to him. I wonder he has not yet written to Geraldine, demanding an explanation. She would tell the truth, of course, and the artist would begin to suspect me of having imprisoned his late guest. I must prevent Geraldine's going out again where she may meet him. She must not visit Rosenbury House again for the present. And Walter Loraine must by all means be prevented from receiving an invitation to the Countess's ball!"

With an anxious look the Earl proceeded to his wife's dressing-room.

The Countess, in *déshabille*, was engaged, with the aid of the Lady Geraldine's visiting-list, in making out her list of guests at her forthcoming ball, preparatory to sending out her invitations. She looked up at the entrance of her husband, saying,—

"Ah, I am glad to see you, Egbert! You have come in time to assist me, if you feel quite well enough. What young gentlemen shall I invite, and what gentlemen shall I conveniently forget in sending out my invitations?"

"It is most important that Walter Loraine, the artist, should be neglected," answered the Earl, seating himself beside his wife, and scanning the names she had written. "I see that his name is not down!"

"Certainly not," replied the Italian. "I want none but well-born persons at my ball! I don't approve of Lady Rosenbury's singular conduct in introducing her gardener's son into her drawing-room! Lady Rosenbury and her son are the first names in the list!"

"That is right, Justina. Lord Rosenbury has just left me, quite disheartened. He repeated his offer to Geraldine this morning, and she has again refused him!"

The Countess arched her eyebrows expressively.

"His disappointment cannot excite mine," continued the Earl. "Fifty thousand pounds gone with her refusal! Barren with debts as I am, what am I to do, Justina? Let Geraldine throw herself away on that beggar, and bestow on him the fortune that should go with the title!"

The Italian shook her head, scanned her husband's face, and then whispered,—

"Would it not be better for her to die than to marry? Better for us, I mean?"

The Earl assented.

"Suppose she should die, then! What matter whether she dies now or fifty years hence? It's all the same."

The Earl looked suspiciously around, as if fearing that the very air might sometime betray him, and then nodded assent.

"You have been thinking of this before, Egbert," said the Countess. "You have quite made up your mind!"

"I have thought, Justina," responded his lordship, "how well it would be if she would only die, but I shrink from—from doing anything. The fact that you have got the box of poisons is always coming into my mind. I wish I had never heard of it, or had destroyed it when you came!"

"You haven't half the strength of mind I have, Egbert," declared the Italian, rather contemptuously. "Besides, I don't look at these matters as you do. If anybody is in my way, it is my policy to remove him or her. I never did such a thing yet, but I shouldn't mind it at all!"

The Earl looked as though her "policy" was not very agreeable to himself, but answered, with a trembling,—

"Then begin now. Destroy all those drugs in your casket but one or two, that they may never be discovered, and so destroy you. Keep enough for one person, and begin to use it this very day!"

The Italian protested against destroying the fruits of the labours of years, stating that they had cost her much money, but she was finally induced to consent by the various considerations her husband brought to her notice.

"I will manage everything, Egbert," she finally said, "but I must have half her fortune! You agree to that?"

The Earl replied in the affirmative.

"You want her to appear at the ball?" inquired the Countess.

"Yes, but she ought to be taking the medicine before that time?"

"She shall!" said the Italian. "I will begin this very day. She will be languid at the ball, and you and I will mention to our friends that she is not at all well—that we

fear she is following her poor mother to an early grave. We will say that she has been ailing a long time, and that we have been alarmed about her, only refraining from consulting a physician because we feared to alarm her."

The Earl considered this an excellent plan. "We will speak of her with great affection," continued the Italian, "and we will at length call in a doctor. I will defy your physician to find any traces of poisons in her system, for I have very subtle medicines! She will fade very swiftly, and in a month from to-day she will be no more!"

The Earl involuntarily shuddered at the cool, quiet tone of the speaker, even while he availed himself of her unscrupulousness and murderous capabilities.

"A month will be about the proper length of time for her to be ill," mused the Countess. "It will not look too sudden. A month from to-day, then we shall enter upon the possession of her fortune. I will get my casket!"

Rising, the Countess drew the lace curtains and looked the door, and then unlocked her trunk, producing the casket with which she had once terrified her husband by remarking that they had been intended for him.

From the collection of tiny phials she selected two, explaining their properties and effects.

These two appeared to be the choicest drugs in the casket, for their glass stoppers were enclosed in gold caps, and the thick glass phials themselves were encased in a wicker-work of gold.

Putting them in her bosom the Countess said,—

"I hardly know where to put the rest, Egbert. They are not easily destroyed or got rid of. They can't be thrown into the river very well, and they can't be burned. I will manage to destroy them, however, before the night of the ball!"

With this resolution, she restored them to her box, and resumed her conversation with the Earl.

"We have settled the general idea, Egbert. Let us now come down to particulars. We must give her her first dose immediately. Let me think how it shall be given!"

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

Her look composed, and steady eye,  
Bespoke her matchless constancy.

—Marmion.

The Countess spent some time in thought, not admitting her husband to her deliberations, and finally announced that her plan for future action was not only formed, but perfected. She showed considerable admiration for what she termed her cleverness; and the Earl, although he instinctively shrank from her, forced himself to praise her, as she unfolded the particulars of her scheme.

The Italian then touched a bell, and sent an order to the butler by the servant who obeyed the summons, and seated herself to await the execution of her command.

In the course of an hour a basket was brought her, containing hot-house grapes, peaches, and pears, all nicely arranged in nests of fresh green leaves.

"How nice they look!" said the Countess, admiringly. "How fortunate that I have been in the habit of ordering such a basket every day! Now watch my proceedings!"

As she arose the Earl followed her movements with a fascinated gaze.

The Countess went to a work-box upon a little inlaid side-table and procured a long, slender needle, with which she returned to her husband's side.

"Geraldine is particularly fond of these large pears, I have noticed," she said, in a calculating tone, taking up the finest specimen of the fruit she had mentioned. "I will prepare this one for her!"

She carefully lanced the fruit with the



needle, and then, taking one of the tiny phials from her bosom, dropped the smallest possible quantity into the puncture.

"There! You wouldn't suspect such a thing, Egbert!" she said, holding up the pear, admiringly. "But the whole pear is poisoned!"

The Earl examined the pear with shrinking curiosity, while his wife exercised her fiendish ingenuity upon a peach.

That finished, she restored the phial to its hiding place, and placed the tampered fruits in a conspicuous position on the very top of the basket.

"I'm now going in to see Geraldine!" said the Italian, rising.

The Earl's courage seemed to fail him at this juncture, and he faltered,—

"Perhaps we'd better not do this thing, Justina. She is so young and beautiful, so full of life. Perhaps we might yet induce her to marry Lord Rosenbury—"

"I know better, Egbert!" interrupted the Italian. "Don't be cowardly now, and spoil all. You know very well that she will never give up that artist, but will marry him and enrich him with the fortune that should be yours!"

"But if it should be found out?"

"It cannot. The poison is so subtle that its action is almost imperceptible. She will appear to be dying of a quick consumption."

"I wish we had not entered upon this course," muttered the Earl, uneasily. "I had a sufficient lead to bear before—"

He paused, alarmed at his unguarded speech.

"What do you mean, Egbert?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing!" was the hurried response.

The Countess did not seem satisfied with this reply, and made some effort to gain her husband's confidence, but he persisted in declaring that he had meant nothing, and that he had no secret whatever from her. Desisting from her vain efforts at length, but by no means dismissing the subject from her mind, the Countess took up the small basket of fruits, and proceeded to Geraldine's apartments.

The maiden was alone in her boudoir, engaged in reading. She looked up at the entrance of the Countess, greeting her politely, and begging her to be seated.

"How pleasant your rooms always are!" said the Italian, accepting the invitation, and seating herself beside the maiden. "It is charmingly cool here when it is warm elsewhere. The Earl, knowing my passion for fruits," she added, "ordered this basket for me, and I have come to share it with you, my dear Geraldine. Is it not temptingly arranged?"

"It is, indeed," replied the maiden, pleased at the attention, and unsuspecting of evil.

"Then favour me by taking that pear, which is particularly fine," said the Countess, indicating the fruit she had first tampered with. "Ah, you must not refuse it because it is large, for here is its twin for me."

With pretended playfulness she placed the poisoned fruit in the maiden's lap, and selected a pear for herself, conversing pleasantly as she ate it.

"I am sure, my dear Geraldine," she said, "that with your uncle's recovery from his singular illness, better days are dawning upon us. I trust that we shall be a happy and united family, and that in due time the Earl may grant his consent to your marriage with that handsome young artist!"

"If he only would consent," sighed the maiden.

"I am sure he will. He has just been telling me of your spirited treatment of Lord Rosenbury, and although he seemed at first annoyed, I am sure that the Earl's sympathies are with you. He never would have advocated Rosenbury's suit but for the heavy bribe offered him, and your poor uncle is so much in debt. But I have great influence with my

husband, and hope soon to effect a change in his sentiments."

The tone of the Italian was so bland, and her manner apparently so earnest, that Lady Geraldine was in part deceived by her professions, and felt her heart warm towards her more than at any time since her arrival.

The Countess saw the effect of her words, but appeared thoughtful and abstracted as she watched the maiden, with a dish of Sevres china in her lap, and a silver fruit knife in her hand, toy with the poisoned pear.

But in reality the Italian was keenly awake to Geraldine's every movement, and when she saw her eat the fruit her eyes glittered strangely.

"If my uncle would only look after the estates a little more, and would curtail his expenses," said Geraldine, "I am persuaded that he would before many years retrieve himself and clear off his debts. He need not be parsimonious nor exercise great economy, but might keep up a handsome style of living, and entertain guests at one of his country seats!"

"You seem to have thought a great deal upon the subject, my dear Geraldine," said the Countess. "I have suggested this very course to the Earl, but he does not like to give up his town house and the gaieties of the fashionable season for a dull country home. I shall continue to urge him, however, for your happiness is at stake."

Geraldine thanked the Countess, who continued,—

"Of course, my ball can make no difference, and I want to go on with it. I shall not consider myself fairly introduced to the fashionable world until I see a description of my ball in the Court papers. By the way, dear, your uncle thinks we had better not invite Mr. Lorraine. The surest way to overcome the Earl's prejudices is to yield in this one respect!"

"I have had no intention of inviting Mr. Lorraine to the ball," replied Geraldine, quietly. "I am quite sure he would decline any invitation sent by me without my uncle's sanction!"

"Quite right and proper," commented the Italian. "Such conduct on his part cannot fail to win the ultimate consideration of the Earl! You have eaten your pear, my dear! Do take that peach!"

Geraldine declined the proffered fruit, taking a few grapes instead, and urging the Countess to take the poisoned peach. It is needless to say that the Countess preferred anything else.

After some further time spent in endeavouring to awaken the trust and confidence of the unsuspecting Lady Geraldine, the Countess withdrew, basket in hand, to her dressing-room.

"Well?" said the Earl, anxiously, as she entered.

"Well!" replied the Italian, with a smile. "She ate the pear and refused the peach, which I must destroy."

She removed the poisoned fruit from the basket, wrapped it in a paper, in order to throw it away unseen, and communicated her success to her husband, awakening his animosity against his lovely niece by relating with much exaggeration Geraldine's sensible remarks about a retrenchment of expenses.

"So my niece wants me to live like a beggar, does she?" he exclaimed, angrily. "She is generous enough to everyone but me, but I suppose she wants to enrich that pauper artist! If you can do so easily, Justina, give her more of that drug-to-day!"

The Countess smiled significantly.

The family met at the dinner-table, and Lady Montford, with much apparent surprise, remarked upon the paleness of Geraldine's cheeks, adding that she feared that she did not feel well.

"I am not quite well," replied Geraldine, "but I am not at all ill. I have taken no outdoor exercise to-day, and feel a little languid in consequence!"

The Earl and Mrs. Tomlins both expressed

hopes that Geraldine would be quite well on the morrow; and the Countess then changed the subject to the more pleasant one of her proposed ball.

After dinner, the family retired to the drawing-room, and the Lady Geraldine entertained them with music, but her increasing languor soon caused her to retire from the piano.

"I am sorry you are not well, dear!" said the Countess, in pretended sympathy. "Perhaps the odour of fresh flowers might revive you. I will gather some for you in the conservatory!"

Without waiting for a reply, she hastened to the conservatory, which was always lighted in the evening, and proceeded to cut a bouquet of odorous blossoms, binding them together with a ribbon.

(To be continued.)

## THE HEIRESS OF DEEPDENE.

### CHAPTER XXVIII.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

MADELINE mentioned casually to Mrs. Treherne that she had been to call on her sister-in-law, but she said nothing of the object of her visit or its failure, although she told her of the meeting with Garlick; which Katie, in her turn, communicated to her husband.

Jack looked very much astonished, and gazed at Katie in a sort of helpless wonder.

"What devilry can he be up to now?" he said. "He has said nothing to me of Miss Byrne. I did not even know that he was aware she was in London. I think I had better write and ask him to come and tell me his plans."

"I think you had better do nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Katie, warmly. "You may depend upon it he has some object in view; and he is quite clever enough to carry it through without your assistance, or mine either!"

So Jack was quiescent; and a fortnight passed away without bringing news of Garlick and his progress.

But during all this time the detective was by no means idle, although his intimacy with Miss Byrne did not advance by the same rapid strides as he had flattered himself would be the case.

Indeed, Keziah seemed to have taken offence at something he had either said or hinted on the evening of his tea-and-muffin visit; and not even a brace of pheasants appeased her sufficiently to induce her to repeat the invitation.

The rooms she occupied were on the same floor as those of the detective, and exactly opposite; and it chanced just at that time that the other apartments in the house were vacant.

Keziah, being of an eminently distrustful nature, made a rule of always locking the doors, both of bed-room and sitting-room, whenever she went out, and putting the keys in her pocket.

Her usual time for taking her constitutional was in the afternoon; and, if the weather chanced to be fine, it was a foregone conclusion that she would be out from three o'clock until half-past four.

Garlick speedily made himself acquainted with her outgoings and incomings; and one day, after watching her tall, gaunt figure disappear down the road, he amused himself by trying a large bunch of keys in her sitting-room door, inserting one after another in the lock, until at last the wards turned, and the door opened.

Then he paused a minute, looked round, and listened to assure himself no one was coming upstairs; after which he carefully entered the room, and went straight to a side table, whereon rested a massive, mahogany,

brass-bound desk, with the initials "K. B." on the plate ornamenting the lid.

"This is where she keeps her papers, no doubt," he muttered to himself, and he produced another and smaller bunch of keys, which, one by one, he inserted.

But this time success did not crown his efforts; and, after trying every key in the bunch twice over, he put them in his pocket again, and left the room, locking the door after him, but looking by no means discouraged.

"I must pay another visit to my friend the locksmith, and get some skeleton keys the next time," he observed, complacently, as he took off the particular one that opened the door from the bunch, and carefully put it in his waistcoat pocket. "I don't anticipate much difficulty."

Nor, in effect, did he find much; for the following afternoon, again taking advantage of its owner's absence, he entered the sitting-room, and speedily managed to open the desk, whose contents he carefully examined, and laid out on the table, congratulating himself at the same time on Miss Keziah's methodical habits, which rendered his task so much the easier.

All the letters were carefully tied up in bundles, and labelled and dated, as were also the different bills and receipts.

As these Mr. Garlick only glanced; but his eyes brightened as he came upon a bundle containing a dozen small, black leather bound books, which proved to be diaries.

From thence he selected one bearing date the previous year, then tied up the parcel again, and replaced it and the letters with scrupulous care, just in the places from which he had taken them.

So exact was he that there was small danger of Miss Byrne suspecting that sacrilegious hands had been laid upon her carefully-guarded desk.

Chuckling with glee he withdrew to his own apartment, and seating himself in an arm-chair, took the important diary from his pocket, and began turning over the leaves.

Keziah had made no vain boast, for each date had its entry in small, fine handwriting that was as easy to read as if it had been copper-plate.

Only one day in the whole year was a blank, and that was the sixteenth October—the day on which Luke Chalmers was murdered.

Garlick looked thoughtful, and leaned his head on his hand, while he contemplated that one page.

"She is cautious," he muttered, "very cautious; but this time her caution has outwitted itself!"

He remained for some time in silent thought, not quite resolved on his next step, and it was the sound of Miss Byrne returning that finally aroused him from his reverie.

Then he got up, and, as he did so, something fell from his wrist to the floor. Picking it up he found it to be the under part of the silver solitaire that fastened his cuffs together. The upper part was missing.

"Now, I wonder where I have lost that!" he muttered, in an annoyed voice. "I do hope to goodness it has not fallen down anywhere in Miss Byrne's room!"

But as ill luck would have it, this was exactly what had happened, and about six o'clock the lady herself marched in, without troubling herself to go through the ceremony of knocking at the door, and held out the identical stud.

"Does this belong to you, Mr. Robinson?"

He bent forward to look at it, and would have taken it in his hand, but she held it tight.

"No, Miss Byrne, I don't think it does!"

"You are telling a lie, and you know it!" was the courteous retort, while Keziah's eyes flashed ominously, and her white lips trembled.

"I have seen you wearing it a dozen times, and I am not such a fool as not to recognise it."

Garlick was silent—determined not to commit himself if he could help it.

"Where did you find it?" he queried.

Before answering, she went back and shut the door, which, on entering, she had left slightly ajar.

Then she faced him, and he saw that her complexion was of the same ashen grey as he had noticed it once before while speaking of her brother.

It was quite clear to him that she "scented danger," and although Mr. Garlick was not a coward, yet he would have given a good deal to escape from her presence at that particular juncture!

Miss Byrne, in a rage, was about as pleasant to face as an angry tigress!

"What have you been doing in my sitting-room?" she hissed, from between her set teeth, planting herself squarely in front of him. "What have you taken from my desk?"

"Taken from your desk, my dear madam!" he stammered, lamely. "What do you mean?"

"Don't prevaricate with me, sir; it's no good! I know you have been at my desk. I found your sleeve-link amongst the papers, and that was proof enough, was not it? You wretch!" She leaned forward until he could feel her hot breath on his cheek. "You have been deceiving me all this while. You are not the person I supposed you to be, and you had some motive for seeking my acquaintance. Fool, fool that I was not to suspect it before!"

She ground her teeth together in a perfect access of fury, and Garlick took the opportunity of drawing farther back, for her nails looked unpleasantly long and sharp, now that they were in such close proximity to his face; and he knew it was quite on the cards that she might make use of them too.

"I thought it was strange you should spend your money on me, and take such pains to cultivate my acquaintance!" she resumed, with a laugh that bitterly mocked her own credulity. "It is right enough I should be punished for it, but," viciously, "there is no reason that you should get off scot-free either. Now, give me back my property—the diary for last year that you have stolen from me."

She held out her hand, and her voice was full of a trenchant authority that had its effect even on Garlick, hardened as he was.

Quick as thought the idea flashed across him that the first action on finding the desk had been opened, was to look at the parcel of diaries, thus proving that she knew how much importance was attached to them, and he also came to the conclusion that candour would be his best method of procedure, now that she suspected so much.

"I am sorry I cannot comply with your request, Miss Byrne," he said, edging round so as to put the table between him and her.

"Then you confess you have robbed me of the diary?"

"I confess that the diary is in my possession."

"And you intend keeping it?"

"For the present—yes."

She glared at him balefully, but seemed to consider before she spoke again.

"What reason have you for wishing to keep it?" she asked at length.

Garlick hesitated, and she added in a quieter voice,—

"You may as well tell me, now that matters have gone so far."

"Perhaps you are right. Well then, I was anxious to know how you spent the day of the sixteenth of October last year."

He said this very slowly, and his eyes were upon hers all the while. Greyer than she was it was impossible for her to become, but her gaze certainly blenched under his scrutiny.

"Ah! Then, with a faint curl of her lip, "Is your curiosity gratified?"

"So far as that goes, your diary has given me no detail—nevertheless, its very silence is a proof in its way."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," and here he drew himself up, and waxed bolder, "I mean that you made

no mention of your journey to Brackendale for fear of incriminating yourself, and, for the same reason, you dared not make a false entry. Do you understand me now, Miss Byrne?"

She retreated a step, and put her hand to her brow. An awful terror was in her eyes, and Garlick could see, from the quick heaving of her bosom, how rapidly her heart was beating. A minute later, and her courage returned.

"No, I don't. Perhaps you will explain yourself," she said, shortly. "But, wait a minute before you begin! Who are you?"

"A detective—by name Garlick."

"The same man whom my brother employed before his trial?"

"The same."

"But—great Heaven!—Godfrey is not employing you to watch me?" she exclaimed, and there was a ring of positive anguish in her voice.

The detective shook his head.

"No. Captain Vane is quite unaware that I am working in his behalf."

"Thank Heaven—oh, thank Heaven, for that!" cried Keziah, her voice breaking into a sob of utter relief. "I could not have borne such cruelty from him. I see now how it is. You and that woman—his wife—are in league together!"

"Wrong again, Miss Byrne. Mrs. Godfrey Vane is as ignorant of what I am doing as her husband. In point of fact, I don't mind telling you that I receive my instructions from Mr. Treherne, who is determined to clear his friend's name, by finding out the real murderer of Luke Chalmers."

"You will never do it!" she exclaimed, savagely. "Whoever killed the wretched man, has no doubt by this time made his escape from the country, and is far beyond your reach!"

She had quite recovered herself by this time, and was facing him as defiantly as ever. Mr. Garlick admired her "pluck," to which he was in a position to render full justice.

"I'm not so sure of that," he replied, with a little confident smile. "In fact, I am hoping, even yet, that success will crown my efforts. I have never failed in a case yet, and I don't like being beaten. I'm thinking, too, that you, Miss Byrne, will give me very considerable assistance."

"I?"

"Yes—by letting me know what you saw when you stood under the tree in Crawley Wood, against which your brother's gun was leaning, on that memorable day when you went to Brackendale and back."

"You are making a mistake, or, anyhow, I don't understand you. What day are you speaking of?"

"The sixteenth of October—the date of the murder."

"I was not at Brackendale then. I did not go for some days after—not until the inquest had taken place."

"Then how did you spend the day?"

"I will be candid with you. You may remember that on that very day there was a murder case being tried in London." She mentioned the name of the accused, and Garlick nodded his head. "Well, I went to hear it, and I was so ashamed of myself that I would not put it down in my diary."

A smile broadened the detective's lips.

"Clever, Miss Byrne—very clever, but it won't wash. No! As you won't tell me I will tell you. Early in the morning of the sixteenth you left this house and went to Paddington, where you took a third-class ticket to Brackendale. At that station you alighted, and proceeded to walk to Brackendale House, through the Crawley Woods. While there, you suddenly saw your half-brother struggling with a man who would have murdered him if he had once got him down, and you—fearing that his brute strength might prevail, and fancying Captain Vane was in danger, took up the gun that

chanced to be resting against the tree under



which you stood, and fired it. You were the murderer of Luke Chalmers!"

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## "SURRENDER."

MISS BYRNE was a self-possessed woman, and in addition to this, she was, in a measure, prepared for the accusation brought against her, and yet as she heard it she staggered back, and threw out her hands with a quick, despairing gesture, as if she were warding off a blow.

A shudder shook her from head to foot, and when she raised her face Garlick was struck by the look of age it wore.

"It is not true!" she gasped out at length. "You have made a gigantic mistake."

"No, I think not. Your photograph has already been identified by the woman at a cottage near the wood, who saw you, and also by a boy, of whom you inquired the nearest way to the station. Then I have the evidence of the landlady of this house, who informs me that on the day in question you went out early in the morning, were absent all day, and did not return until late at night."

"What does that amount to?" she demanded, roughly. "It is a thing I often do."

"Excuse me, it is a thing you have never done before since you took these apartments, and that is why the landlady remembers it so well!"

"You have been cross-examining her, then?"

"Nothing of the sort! All this comes out in casual conversation, though I do not deny that I led the conversation into the channel I wished to explore."

"You are very clever!" she sneered.

The detective bowed, as if he appreciated the compliment.

"I hope to prove myself so, as far as this case goes," he observed, modestly. "For some time I was at fault. I knew a woman had fired the gun; but my suspicions were on the wrong track."

"Whom did you suspect first?" quickly.

"Ellen Chalmers!"

"And she it was who committed the murder!" exclaimed Miss Byrne, with feverish haste.

"No. She is dead, poor thing! But her innocence of that crime was proved to my complete satisfaction; and then I had to form a fresh theory. This I was aware might turn out to be false, yet I decided it was worth trying."

"I knew for a fact that the guilty woman, whoever she might be, had come from London, and returned there the same day. That much was told me by the return half of a ticket I found, and the testimony of the porters at the two village stations."

"Then I remembered another occurrence that had struck me at the moment."

"Directly after Captain Godfrey Vane was acquitted, you, Miss Byrne, were taken from the court in hysterics. The Captain went to your lodgings with you; and when he came out I was waiting at the door for him."

"He looked queer and dazed-like—as if he had had a shock—quite different to what he had looked when he left the court—for then he was smiling and elated."

"I thought of this later on, and it helped me to decide. Then another thing confirmed my idea."

"Afterwards, when all his friends turned the cold shoulder on the Captain—and even then the newspapers hinted that he had got off unfairly—he would not let me go on with my investigations, though I told him I was quite sure I should be able to spot the guilty person in time."

"Of course, I can see now what his motive was; and he preferred to suffer under an unjust suspicion rather than deliver you over to justice!"

Garlick was surprised at the effect of his words, for Keziah flung herself down in a chair, and began to sob bitterly, thoroughly unnerved by this last speech of his.

"Then it is for my sake he has gone away! for my sake! for my sake!" she repeated, wildly, over and over again, and with apparent unconsciousness that she had a listener. "Oh, Godfrey! after all, that woman has not turned your heart against your sister! After all, you love me enough to sacrifice your happiness for my safety! Oh, Godfrey! Godfrey!"

Her sobs became presently less noisy, but they were none the less bitter.

Without knowing it, Garlick had appealed to the master-passion of her life—her affection for her half-brother; and now all the jealousy that had obscured it rolled away, and she recognised how great was the sacrifice he had made on her behalf!

Knowing nothing of what had passed between him and Madeline, she believed that Godfrey had even deserted his wife rather than run any risk of incriminating his sister; and this idea gave her the subtlest, deepest joy she had ever before known.

Under its influence she started up, and exclaimed, brokenly,—

"Your life shall not be spoiled, Godfrey! I will show you that I can be equally generous! and you shall be at liberty to come back again, and hold your head up before all the world as an innocent man!" Then she turned to Garlick, "Yes, you were right! It was I who fired the gun at Luke Chalmers, because I feared that he was overpowering my brother, who had not recovered from the wound the wretched man had inflicted on him a fortnight before! I could see the lust for Godfrey's blood written in his eyes, and I thought if I hesitated it would be too late! I did not intend to kill him, but only to disable him!"

"A fine distinction for a lady to make!" observed Garlick.

Keziah smiled scornfully.

"As it happens I know more about guns than you give me credit for. Years ago, Godfrey and I used to practise together with pistols at a flying target, and my sight and aim are both good. But on that particular morning, I was agitated, I suppose, and instead of hitting Chalmers in the arm, as I intended, I hit him in the breast. Then, whom should I see come running up but Madeline Brereton! The sight of her made me determine to leave the spot as soon as possible, and so I hurried away, and walked to Brackendale station."

"But what took you to Brackendale at all that day?" queried Garlick.

"A letter from Godfrey, telling me he had been shot at. I fancied he was concealing his state from me, and that he was worse than he professed himself to be, so I resolved to go to Brackendale and back in the day, and set my mind at rest about him."

"Afterwards, when I heard he had been arrested for the murder, I thought I would give myself up, but second thoughts counselled differently. It seemed to me impossible that he would be condemned, and if he were acquitted there was no reason why my share in the tragedy should ever become known."

"There! now you know all, and I suppose the next thing will be to take me into custody. But you need not flatter yourself that Godfrey has you to thank for this confession. No magistrate in the world would have granted a warrant for my arrest on the very slender evidence in your possession, and you will bear in mind that it is for my brother's sake alone that I have volunteered this statement."

Garlick was prudently silent. Perhaps he agreed with Miss Byrne more completely than he cared to admit.

Late that same night Mr. Garlick made his way to the Queen Anne Villa, and had an interview with Jack and Katie, when he

nearly took their breath away with the story he had to relate.

"Miss Byrne, the culprit, Keziah Byrne!" murmured Jack, running his fingers through his hair, and looking what his wife termed "flabbergasted." "Well, I never was so much surprised in my life—never!"

"I don't know about that," rejoined Katie. "For my part, I would believe anything of a woman with a temper like hers. Poor thing!" added Mrs. Treherne, with some sort of compunction. "We must not be too hard on her, since she has made a full confession at last. And you say"—turning to Garlick—"that she went with you to a police-station, and surrendered herself?"

"Yes, and told her story right through from beginning to end without stopping once," rejoined the detective, a certain amount of admiration betraying itself in his voice. "Never blenched, or hesitated, or beat about the bush."

"Did she feel her position very much, do you think?" asked Jack, who, as we know, was extremely soft-hearted, and began to have sundry qualms concerning his share in bringing Miss Byrne to justice.

"Not she! From her manner you would have thought she was scoring some great victory. Of course the news will be in all the papers to-morrow, and wherever he may be, Captain Vane is sure to see it in time. Then, I suppose it will bring him home. I thought I should have had more difficulty with Miss Byrne, for she is not the sort of woman to throw up the sponge in a hurry, and she would have fought it out, tooth and nail, if she had not been full of the notion that it was on purpose to save her, Captain Vane had left England."

"What do you think will be done to her? I mean what punishment is she likely to get?" asked Katie, rather fatteringly. "Will a verdict of 'wilful murder' be brought against her, do you imagine?"

"Pooh, pooh! nothing of the sort!" Garlick responded, with some contempt. "It'll be 'manslaughter' most likely, and they'll sentence her to ten years' imprisonment, perhaps; but then there'll be a fuss made over it in the papers. Sentimental people will write and urge that what she did was for her brother's sake, and in the end she'll be let off scot-free, or something near it. You need not distress yourself, ma'am. She will get no more than she deserves, in any case!"

Perhaps Katie thought this last view of the question did not promise specially well for Miss Byrne. Anyhow, she made no reply, and soon afterwards the detective took leave, and husband and wife were left to compliment each other on the result of the investigation, for which they were responsible.

"At all events, we have proved Godfrey's innocence!" said Mrs. Treherne.

"Yes; but I'm not sure that he will feel particularly grateful!" responded her husband, dubiously. "I suppose you won't tell Madeline till the morning?"

Katie decided this would be the wiser course; so the next day, directly after breakfast, she informed the young girl of the new turn events had taken.

Madeline listened very quietly, and it almost seemed as if she had been prepared for the truth; at any rate, she evinced no surprise, and made no comment. As Katie finished speaking, she said,—

"You will go and see Keziah, will you not?"

"I!" repeated Mrs. Treherne, in surprise.

"For my sake and Godfrey's!" pleaded the young girl. "I would go myself, only I am quite sure she would at once order me from her presence, and it seems dreadful that she should have no word of sympathy now that she is in such a terrible position!"

"Serve her right. She should not behave so abominably to people when they try to be friendly with her!" exclaimed Mrs. Treherne, warmly. A minute later, and she kissed the young wife affectionately.

"You are an angel of sweetness and forgiveness, Madeline, and for your sake I'll bury the hatchet, and pay Miss Byrne a visit."

When she was alone Madeline threw out her hands with a gesture of passionate relief.

"Thank Heaven the stain is lifted from him, and, thank Heaven, I never once doubted his innocence of that charge at least!" she cried out; and then she fell on her knees, while a fervent thanksgiving went up from the bottom of her heart, that at length Godfrey would be able to hold up his head as an honourable man before those who had pointed at him the finger of scorn!

## CHAPTER XXX.

### SUSPENSE.

UNDER present circumstances there was no necessity for the public to know the share taken by Mr. Garlick in bringing Luke Chalmers' murderer to justice, and so Keziah got the benefit of a good deal of public sympathy, for, as the newspapers pointed out, she had surrendered herself from a pure love of truth, and, but for her own confession, no one would ever have suspected her guilt.

This being so, Keziah had not such a bad time as might have been anticipated; and although it would have been quite easy for her to have had her trial put off until it was seen whether her brother would return and give evidence, she, nevertheless, elected to be tried at once.

Nor would she betray Godfrey's whereabouts. He had made her promise to keep it secret, she said, and nothing in the world should induce her to break her word.

A first-rate lawyer was engaged on her behalf, and Madeline and the Trehernes spared no pains in their endeavours to make things go as smoothly for her as possible.

She herself accepted her position with the most perfect equanimity, and made no sort of pretence at regret for the crime she had committed.

"It was only done in Godfrey's defence," she said, quietly. "Luke Chalmers would have killed him if I had not interfered, and as one of them had to die, I am very glad it was not my brother!"

This was almost the view of the case taken by the jury, and after a powerful speech on the part of her advocate they returned a verdict of "manslaughter," with a strong recommendation to mercy.

The sentence passed upon her was one of five years' imprisonment; but, as Garlick had foreseen, it was followed by a considerable amount of newspaper agitation; and, finally, the Home Secretary, taking the circumstances and the jury's recommendation into consideration, decided on granting a free pardon, and Miss Keziah Byrne was thereupon set at liberty.

Mr. Garlick was one of the first who pressed forward to greet her on her release.

"I offer you my congratulations, Miss Byrne, and I hope you'll let bygones be bygones. I did my duty simply, and I flatter myself I won the first trick; but what does that amount to so long as you have scored the rubber?"

Miss Byrne smiled grimly, but permitted the detective to shake her hand in token that she bore no malice.

Meanwhile there was no news of Godfrey. Morning after morning dawned, and Madeline said to herself, "Surely he will come to-day!" but night fell, and did not bring him; and her heart grew heavier as the dread fear fell upon her that he would not come at all!

Of course he had read of his sister's surrender, and it would be only natural that it should influence his return; but when Keziah was finally released, and a month passed without bringing any tidings, Madeline grew sick with "hope deferred."

"He will not come!" she murmured, miserably.

"It was I who, with my wicked suspicions, drove him away, and now he will remain an exile rather than consent to face them again. Yes, Keziah was right. I have been his bane from the first!"

It was hard to disguise her anxiety from Katie and Jack—who were both much surprised at Godfrey's continued absence—for, of course, they were in complete ignorance of the real reason that had parted him from his wife, and had attributed it wholly and solely to his unfortunate position with regard to Luke Chalmers.

And now spring had come, bringing bright summer days, and soft breezes that told of violets hiding in their green leaves under the hedges, and banks starred over with faint primrose blossoms.

Katie and Jack, who had been absent from home a long while, felt they were not justified in staying in London any longer, and they were both very anxious to take Madeline back with them to Brackendale.

At first she refused, but afterwards the thought of being alone in the house, which was full of memories of Godfrey, and those first brief days of her married life, made her so wretched that she altered her mind.

Even Brackendale, with all its haunting shadows, would be less terrible to her than London without Godfrey.

And so they all journeyed down together, and April gave way to May, that in its turn to June, and Brackendale was a mass of roses, much as dear old Deepdene had been in the days that seemed so far away.

And yet it was only just a year since Sir Richard Vane's death—only twelve months since Madeline stood in the garden at Deepdene, amongst the roses, and told herself what a beautiful world she lived in, and how fair a thing life was!

That was more than she could say now. Sometimes, indeed, a very sickness of despair would seize her as she thought of all the long days that lay before her—loveless—joyless—hopeless.

Katie Treherne watched her with an anxious affection that she had never given to anyone else, and she noticed that each week, as it passed without tidings, made a perceptible difference in the young girl's appearance. She grew paler, thinner, more ethereal looking, and her large dark eyes were filled with a curiously patient longing that was in itself pathetic.

"Godfrey is a wretch!" the little lady declared, with quite vicious emphasis, when she and her husband were *à deux*. "He is utterly unworthy of such a girl as Madeline!"

"Pity you did not always think so, dear!" lazily responded Jack, who was reading the *Times*, and smoking a huge cigar as he lay comfortably back on his cane lounge.

"Now, that is too bad of you, Jack—it is like kicking a man when he's down! You know very well that what I did was for the best."

"Of course. Only it hasn't turned out 'best.'"

"How was I to know that, stupid! Am I a prophetess able to look into the future? I wish to goodness I were," she continued in a different tone, "for then there might be a chance of my discovering what the end of this wretched business is likely to be!"

"Madeline looks very ill," put in Jack, irrelevantly, as he took his cigar from his mouth, and watched the blue rings of smoke curling lightly upwards. "And she's got a nasty flush on her cheeks when she gets at all excited. Shouldn't be a bit surprised if she were to go into a decline!"

Katie burst into tears, and then turning fiercely on her lord and master abused him very roundly as a wicked, heartless man, who had no regard whatever for her feelings!

It took Mr. Treherne some time to pacify her, but when this was effected she suddenly changed her tone.

"I am sure Godfrey is either ill or dead!" she exclaimed; "otherwise he would come

back, now he knows the shadow that lay upon him is removed. I have an idea! I will go up and see Keziah Byrne myself, and wring the truth from her!"

"Take my advice," said Jack, "don't! You'll get no change out of Miss Byrne, and she'll delight in tantalising you."

"I don't care!" recklessly. "I shan't lose anything by my visit, and it's just on the cards that I may gain a hint, at all events. Anyhow, I'll go!"

And so she did, Madeline of course being kept in complete ignorance of her intention.

That mention of Jack's of a "decline" had alarmed Katie, inasmuch as it chimed in with her own vague fears, which, up to now, she had hardly dared put into words. Yes, Madeline certainly looked very ill, and, if something did not rouse her, she would quietly fade away out of life, like a snow-wreath in the sunshine.

Mrs. Treherne accomplished her journey in one day, leaving Brackendale early in the morning, and returning by the last train at night. Her husband drove her to the station in his dog-cart, and was waiting for her when she came back.

"Well?" he said, interrogatively, as she settled herself comfortably beside him, and the mare jogged steadily on through the soft, scented dusk of the summer night. "What did Miss Byrne say?"

Katie began to laugh, and it was some moments before she became serious enough to answer the question.

"I went to her lodgings at about three o'clock," she said, presently, "and when I was taken in her sitting-room, what do you think she was doing? Playing cribbage with Mr. Garlick!"

"Nonsense!"

"It's true! There they were, with the cribbage board on the table before them, as solemn as two judges, and looking as if their very lives depended on the issue of the game. I declare it was as much as I could do to prevent myself from laughing outright—especially when Keziah glared sternly at me over her spectacles, as if she had been the Medusa herself. However, I controlled myself, and played my cards with such diplomacy that I was actually invited to tea!"

"But Godfrey, what about him?" impatiently.

"I am coming to him—all in good time. What I said to Keziah I need not tell you,"—here Jack made a grimace—"but I contrived to get this much out of her. Godfrey is in India. He does not write to her, but she writes to him, at an address in one of the big cities there, and, as the letters are never returned to her, it is to be taken for granted that he gets them. Therefore we must write, or rather I must, and if I don't get him back my name is not Katie Treherne!"

"But the address, Katie?"

"The address will come in good time," responded Katie, with a wicked twinkle in her eyes. "I confess that the fair Keziah did not oblige sufficiently to give it me, but Mr. Garlick accompanied me to Paddington station, and he promised to procure it for me!"

## CHAPTER XXXI. AND LAST.

MRS. TREHERNE'S confidence in her own fascinations, and Garlick's abilities, were not misplaced, for at the end of a week there arrived an envelope directed to her, and inside was the address of a firm of bankers in Calcutta.

Not a word from the detective himself, to say how he had obtained the secret. No date—even the handwriting was disguised.

Mr. Garlick did not care for the task of betraying Miss Byrne's secret; but the Trehernes had treated him so liberally over what he described as "that last little affair" that he was glad to have a chance of showing that he was not ungrateful. Besides, he was a



man accustomed to viewing matters from an abstract, as well as concrete, point of view, and it was his opinion that it would be better for all parties concerned if Captain Vane could be induced to return.

Katie it was who wrote the letter that was intended to recall the young officer, and we may be sure her case did not suffer from not being put strongly enough!

As a matter of fact, Katie was really extremely anxious about Madeline's health, and she told Captain Vane very plainly that it was her opinion his wife would not live very long if he did not return, and thus set her mind at rest.

"Of what has passed between you and Madeline I know little or nothing," she said, in conclusion; "but this I do know, that she is pining herself into a consumption on account of your absence, and therefore I implore you to come to England, even if you leave it a week afterwards!"

The letter was despatched, and then the little lady set herself to wait, with what patience she might, for the reply.

"Of course you can't expect to have one by the next mail!" said Jack, who was well-nigh as anxious as herself. "In all probability, Godfrey is somewhere up-country, and the letter will have to be forwarded on to him."

This surmise proved correct, for two mails came in without bringing the expected answer, and Katie was beginning to despair.

Moreover, as the summer waned, so Madeline grew more and more fragile, and the flush on her cheek deepened to a brilliant crimson, that would have been most beautiful if it had not been so terribly suggestive.

A doctor was called in, who examined her, but he declared there was no organic disease—nothing that his stethoscope could discover, or his medicine reach. She wanted tone—she was below par; perhaps a change of air to the sea might do her good.

So in October the Treherne—baby included—and their guest went to Brighton; but neither the journey nor the sea-breeze seemed to have any effect on Madeline, who was as quiet and listless as ever.

"You are taking a great deal of trouble on my account," she said, gratefully one day to Katie, after they had been at Brighton rather more than a fortnight. "I don't think I deserve all your kindness!"

"My dear!" Katie cried, impulsively, with tears in her eyes, "when I see you going about like this—a ghost of your old self—I feel I am a murderess!"

"What nonsense, Katie!"

"It's not nonsense! It's the miserable truth! It was through me you married Godfrey Vane! and it's through him you are so unhappy!"

Madeline drew herself up quickly, and her eyes flashed.

"No!" she exclaimed, with a strange thrill in her voice. "He is not to blame! I have been in fault all through; and I have no right to complain if retribution has seized me! Do you know," she added, with a sad smile, "I often think that Fate has a grudge against me, for everything I have to do with seems to turn out badly! I am dreadfully tired of it all, Katie! Sometimes when I lie down at night I feel inclined to pray that I may never wake up again!"

Katie choked back the tears that, in spite of her endeavours, would spring to her eyes, and busied herself in peering out the glass of port wine that she insisted on Madeline drinking every morning.

After this ceremony was over she started the young girl out for a drive with Jack, and then sat down in front of the fire, and lost herself in a reverie that, to judge from her face, was far from being pleasant.

She was aroused by the opening of the door, and a servant announced,—

"Captain Vane, if you please, ma'am!"

She sprang from her chair, and faced him; and her surprise and relief was so great, that

almost for the first time in her life Katie lost her tongue.

Yes, it was Godfrey!—bronzed and bearded, and older looking, but still the same handsome, blue-eyed Godfrey of old; and Katie's delight at seeing him was so great that she afterwards told her husband her first impulse was to kiss him!

"Then why, in the name of goodness, didn't you do so?" phlegmatically replied Jack.

"Oh!" she cried, at last, seizing his hand, and half laughing, half crying, "thank Heaven, you have come! I was beginning to despair of ever setting eyes on you again!"

He smiled gravely, and led her to a couch, when he seated himself beside her.

"Yes," he said, "I have come; but it was not without a severe struggle!"

"Not when I told you how ill your wife was?"

His eyes fell, though his face became clouded over with visible anxiety.

"Is she really ill?" he said, in a low voice, "or was it only—"

He paused, and Katie said quickly,—

"A ruse of mine, would you say, to bring you back? No, Godfrey. I confess I would not have hesitated at such a ruse if it had been suggested to me; but, in this case, it is the truth. Madeline is really ill!"

"Where is she?"

"Jack has taken her out for a drive, but they will be back in half-an-hour's time. It tires her to be out too long."

"Does she know that you wrote to me?"

"No!"

"Then why do you think my presence will do her any good?"

Katie turned upon him with some impatience.

"Don't ask foolish questions, Godfrey Vane! Why do you think flowers like sunshine? Because it is their nature. Why do women want love? Because it is their nature too. I tell you Madeline is simply dying of love for you!"

He started violently, then shook his head.

"You are mistaken, Mrs. Treherne. So far from Madeline caring for me, she told me with her own lips that my presence was so distasteful to her that nothing should ever induce her to live under the same roof with me. That does not look like love, does it?"

Katie did not attempt to conceal her puzzled wonderment, but she stuck to her point.

"I knew nothing of that. As I told you, Madeline has not taken me into her confidence with regard to the relations existing between you and her; but I can see as far as most people, and I tell you again she loves you. By-the-way, I suppose you know all about your sister's trial?" with an abrupt change of subject.

Godfrey's face flushed a deep dark red.

"Yes; but I knew nothing of it until the trial was over. Poor Keziah!"

"You suspected her guilt from the beginning?"

"Not from the very beginning, but from the day I myself was released—the day Keziah was taken out of court in a fit of hysterics. Something she said then gave me an inkling of the truth, and later on I was sure of it."

"That was the reason you would not let Garlick go on with his investigation?"

He bowed assentingly, without raising his eyes.

"You are a brave man, Godfrey, but you are a stupid one!" said Katie, with the remarkable candour that occasionally distinguished her. "You should have been perfectly open with your wife, and then a good many of those complications might have been avoided. However, it's no good talking of that now. I hope even yet there may be time for you to repair your error."

He seemed not to hear her. His hands were clamped on his knees, and his eyes fixed on the floor. Interrupting his hostess unceremoniously, he said,—

"Is Madeline so ill as you would have me believe?"

"You shall judge for yourself presently, but I must prepare her for your arrival. I dare not let her see you too suddenly, for fear of the shock."

Again Mrs. Treherne was interrupted, but this time it was not by Godfrey.

The door had opened while she was speaking, and Madeline herself stood on the threshold—Madeline, with a face as white as maythorn blossoms, and with great dark eyes full of passionate longing and anxiety.

She had come in from her drive earlier than usual, and on the hall table she had seen a hat and stick—a stick with a curious silver handle, that she recognised immediately.

Without giving herself time for thought she had opened the door of the morning-room, and there she stood, wrapped in the rich furs that Godfrey himself had bought her, her two hands pressed convulsively across her bosom, her breath coming and going with fluttering rapidity, her lips parted, but no word issuing from them.

Katie took in the situation at a glance. A crisis had been brought about without her intervention, and all she could do now was to let things take their chance.

She got up, and drew Madeline a little forward; then she left the room, closing the door after her.

For a few seconds they stood still, and faced each other—these two, who had knelt at the altar side by side and pledged their troth, while love had mocked them from afar.

Since then oceans had rolled between them, and each had thought never to set eyes on the other again. Now, once more, Fate had brought them together for the last time. If they parted now it would be for all eternity.

Godfrey saw that Mrs. Treherne had not been deceiving him when she said his wife was ill; for he—even better than those who had been constantly with her—saw how altered she was.

And yet, never in her life had Madeline looked more lovely than as she stood there on the threshold, held by a spell of silence which she had no power to break, even while her heart was beating one great beam of joy at once more beholding him.

How handsome he was, how brave, how noble! And to think that she had ever doubted him!

"Madeline!"

At the sound of his voice uttering her name the spell was broken, and she sprang forwards, and fell at his feet, holding up her hands in piteous entreaty.

"Oh! Godfrey—husband—forgive me, forgive me!"

With a strange look in his eyes, Godfrey raised her, and then held her at arm's length, while he gazed earnestly into her face.

"Forgive you, Madeline!" he repeated, restraining himself by a great effort. "What have I to forgive? The fact that you believed me guilty of the murder when my own conduct was my worst accuser?"

"Not that—oh, never that!" she cried, excitedly. "I knew you were innocent of Luke Chalmers' death!"

"You knew I was innocent!" he repeated, in amazement. "Why, then, did you send me from you?"

It was her turn to look amazed now. Did he not know of what she had really suspected him?

Then, in a few words as possible, she told him of Sir Richard's letter, and the confirmation given to it by Harsahaw.

Self-controlled as he was, Godfrey could not quite master his indignant rage at the double-dyed treachery of the man.

"The villain!" he muttered. "I understand everything now, my uncle's conduct, my disinheritance—all! And it is him I have to thank for it." He was silent for awhile, his hands still holding his wife's arms. Then he looked at her, and his face softened. "So that was why you sent me away, Madeline,



["YOU MAY AS WELL TELL ALL, NOW MATTERS HAVE GONE SO FAR!" SAID MISS BYRNE.]

because you thought I was as bad as Earnshaw himself?"

She said nothing, but the lovely head drooped lower and lower. A sudden pang rent Godfrey's heart as the conviction of how fragile she looked came upon him.

He led her to a chair, then knelt in front of her, taking her two hands in his.

"Listen, Madeline," he said, in a low, terse voice. "I owe you a confession. It is quite true that I was taken captive by Ellen Chalmers' beauty, and—as much through having nothing to do as anything else—I made love to her, and asked her to marry me, but it is equally true that I was very much relieved when she refused to take me at my word. My passion for her was a fancy, an infatuation—never love. It was reserved for another woman to teach me the real meaning of love!"

She lifted her head quickly, and all the sweet, red colour died from her face. Her hands, as they lay in his, grew suddenly chill. He bent down and kissed them.

"Shall I tell you who that other woman was, Madeline? It was yourself—your own sweet, brave, innocent self! Ah, darling! did you really think I should have been mean enough to take advantage of your generosity if I had not been tempted by something stronger than fear of the perilous position in which I was placed? Even as it was, I felt I had no right to marry you; but I had grown to love you so dearly that the temptation was too strong for me, and I said to myself, 'She is heartwhole yet, and it shall be mine to teach her the meaning of love,' and so I would have taught you, Madeline, if—"

It was she who interrupted him, her cheeks all lovely with rosy blushes, her eyes luminous as stars in the purple depths of a summer sky, her lips quivering with emotion.

"If I had not learned the lesson already, Godfrey!" He looked at her a moment as if not understanding; then his face became trans-

figured, and he strained her to his breast with a passionate gladness, too deep to find expression in words.

They had been married ever twelve months, and this was the first time their lips had ever touched, but it seemed to both that all the past was redeemed in that one caress!

Godfrey took his wife away to the south of France, and there, encompassed with devotion, surrounded by all the luxuries that wealth could give, or love devise, the lightness came back to her step, and the natural healthful red to her cheeks. She had been dying for the simple reason that she did not care to live; but now all that was changed—the world itself was changed, and life glorified by the splendour of Godfrey's love!

What a life it was there in the sunny South, amongst the flowers and the verdure, under azure skies, by the shore of the blue Mediterranean! Sometimes Madeline doubted whether it was really herself—really the little, lonely, unloved girl whom Sir Richard Vane had made heiress of Deepdene! Her very identity was changed; and, sometimes, when she caught sight of her radiant, flower face in the glass, she would stay and look at it, with a soft, little laugh of delighted surprise, while she thought of the wan, pinched features that used to look back at her from the mirror at Brackendale, before Godfrey came!

"We will stay here all the winter!" Godfrey said, "for our honeymoon. We deserve a longer honeymoon than other people, because we had to postpone it so long, and then in the spring we will go back to Deepdene."

And so, when the leaves were all young and fresh and green, and Deepdene looked its best, its new master and mistress returned—a triumphant return, involving arches, and banners, and flower-strewn pathway, and bands of music, and crowds of enthusiastic tenants, all eager to catch a glimpse of the bride and bridegroom.

"A handsome pair," they said, proudly, "as handsome a pair as you'll find in the three counties. If they're as good as their looks, we shall have nothing to complain of."

And there, in the hall, stood Katie and Jack Treherne—the latter with a small fluffy-haired young person on one of his brawny shoulders—ready to welcome the wanderers back to their home. Katie looked more like a Dresden China Shepherdess than ever—except that tears of joy were in her blue eyes, and tears are weaknesses never indulged in by Dresden shepherdesses!

And so we will leave them with a happy future stretching before them, and the radiance of love about their path. All the ugly shadows are chased away. Doctor Earnshaw's dark face is seen no more in Deepdene; and although up to the present, Keziah Byrne has resolutely refused to pay a visit to her brother's house, Madeline does not despair of softening her ancient heart now that she has ceased to be "HEIRESS OF DEEPEDENE!"

[THE END.]

THE average rate of a sailing vessel in making a passage may be estimated at 100 nautical miles per day, and that of a steam vessel at 200 nautical miles per day.

A NOVEL door, especially intended for the economy of space, has just been patented. The door is an adaption of the principle of the roller-top desk and cover, and consists of a series of slates about one and one-half inches wide and three quarters of an inch thick, jointed together by wooden spindles, one revolving within another. In the roller-top desk the slates are joined by ribbons of steel or canvas. When the door is opened it is wound upon a spiral drum at the top and bottom, and all is enclosed within the door casing. A three-foot door winds up in a roll seven inches in diameter.





[GABRIELLE WAS SITTING ON THE TWISTED ROOTS OF AN OLD OAK.]

NOVELETTE—concluded.]

## THE MYSTERY OF MADAME MALVAISON.

## CHAPTER IV.

"Oh deep eyes,  
Darker and softer than the bluest dusk  
Of August violets darker and deep,  
Like crystal fathomless lakes in summer noon;  
Oh I sad, sweet longing smile."

Four days later Madame Malvaizon arrived at the Dower House, accompanied by Mrs. Morris and her husband, a brace of smart-looking maid-servants, a little dog, a monkey, a squirrel, and a big Persian cat, besides a heap of boxes and packing-cases.

The Verrals were informed of her arrival by "Master" Clough, the old man who had been put into the house with his wife to take care of it till it was let, and who came to tell them that the strange lady had offered to employ him as gardener if he chose to take the post, and that he was not averse to it, if they didn't mind; and as "Mus" Verral, as he called Paul, didn't mind in the least, the old chap went off gaily forthwith to be installed as Madame Malvaizon's gardener, and to potter about amid the weeds and riotously luxurious blooms in the quaint garden.

"I suppose we must call on her," remarked Mrs. Verral, just a trifle reluctantly, when their tenant had occupied the house exactly one week.

"Certainly we must," cried Gertie, vivaciously. "It would be horribly rude on our part not to do so. Besides, I am dying to see what she is like!"

"Curiosity killed the cat, Gertie!" laughed her brother.

"Well, it won't kill me," she retorted, "and I daresay you are as anxious to see

her as I am; only, manlike, you won't own to it."

"No, I can't honestly say I feel any curiosity with regard to this lady, or any desire to see her. Most probably, she is old and ugly, and yellow as a guinea."

"Oh, Paul!" exclaimed Phyllis.

"Well, my dear, what is the matter?"

"Clough told Jane she is as lovely as an angel!"

"Oh, rubbish! What does an old fellow like Clough know about it. He thinks a scarecrow in a cornfield lovely."

"Well come and judge for yourself!" laughed Gertie. "We are going to call there this afternoon. You ought to come too."

"Thank you, I'd much rather not," rejoined Paul, with a grimace. "I'll leave the enjoyment of calling on our tenant to you, my dears!"

"You really ought to come, dear!" expostulated his mother gently. "She is your tenant!"

"I won't dispute the honour with you, mater. You shall have all the glory to yourself," and laughing, as usual in his gay, careless way, he walked off to lounge on the summit of the sun-smitten downs and think of the beautiful stranger whose dog he had rescued from Pincher's ravaging jaw.

When the shadows were beginning to lengthen a little, and the early and well-behaved rooks to fly homeward, Mrs. Verral, Gertie and Phyllis set out to walk to the Dower House, to pay their first visit to Madame Malvaizon. Gertie talked of nothing else save their tenant the whole way there, and Mrs. Verral responded rather languidly to her lively sallies, while Phyllis was strangely silent, for generally she bore her share of the conversation gaily. But to-day there was a cloud over the bright, piquante face, a shadow lingering in the soft brown eyes. She was distrustful and listless—altogether unlike her gay, happy self.

Gertie's chatter only ceased when they stood

before the coffin-lid-like door, which was shut, though every window in the house was thrown wide, as though to admit as much of the sunshine and the sweet, balmy summer air as possible.

The door was opened by Morris, who ushered them at once into the drawing-room, which was as much changed as if the wand of a magician had been waved over it. The cold white-and-gold chairs and tapestried couches were covered with pale-terracotta coloured Indian silk, and the same soft material was artistically draped around the hideous mirrors. Little occasional tables of the last fashion were dotted about here and there, and fancy stools, and jardinières, full of lovely flowering plants, while cut flowers were in bowls and vases, and specimen glasses in such profusion that they made the room look like a conservatory. A grand piano stood near the window; an easel draped in terracotta plush, on which stood the sketch of a lovely female head, stood opposite, and the polished floor was nearly covered with splendid white fur rugs; while the chintz curtains, made and hung up by Gertie, were replaced by rich plush ones, that lent an air of comfort and cosiness to the room, and the fireplace was also draped with it.

"She must be very rich!" murmured Gertie, in an audible whisper, "and she certainly has good taste, hasn't she, mother? Those draperies are most artistic!" and her critical eye rested in a satisfied way on the soft rich, silky folds.

"Yes," assented Mrs. Verral, rather coldly, as she sat very upright in her chair, looking the handsome aristocrat all over, and feeling a glow of haughty pride come over her as she waited to meet this unknown tenant, who, for all she knew, might be a wolf that she had foolishly let into her sheep fold, and who might rend and devour her lambs.

"Lucky thing the place is let to such a tenant!" went on Gertie, appraising the value of everything mentally.

"The flowers are lovely!" said Phyllis. "Perhaps she is like the flowers?" and as she spoke the door opened softly, and a tall, finely-figured woman entered.

A woman above the average height, with sloping shoulders, and a peculiarly graceful way of moving, despite that in her movements there was something sinuous and almost cat-like. Her head was set regally on a rounded white throat, and was crowned with hair the colour of ripe corn. Her eyes were of the deepest, darkest blue, fringed with long black lashes, and full of intense melancholy. Her brows were also black, and in startling contrast to her skin, which was of the clear waxen pallor of a stephanotis blossom; her features were classically regular, and her mouth most beautiful. She was dressed in a long sweeping robe of some thin black material, confined at the waist by a silver snake with sapphire eyes, and bracelets of the same curious flexible, snake-like pattern clasped her wrists. She came forward slowly; a little smile, that intensified the melancholy look in her eyes, flickered about her lips, as she took Mrs. Verral's extended hand, and then Gerlie's and Phyllis's.

"This is most kind!" she said, in a soft, low voice, full of sweet, sad music. "I am so glad to see you."

"Thanks," rejoined Mrs. Verral, just the least thing in the world disconcerted by the aristocratic and thoroughbred appearance of her tenant. "We would have come to call on you before, only we thought you would rather be left in peace to conclude your arrangements here."

"My people have been very busy," she acknowledged, with a little graceful bend of the beautiful head; "but I must admit that I have done little save superintend matters and give orders."

"Your orders have been well carried out," smiled Gerlie.

"I am glad you think so," rejoined Madame Malvaizon, giving her a grateful glance from those sad, strange, inscrutable eyes. "Morris and her husband worked very hard to carry out my ideas, and they deserve all the credit. I only looked on. I am really a very lazy woman," turning to Mrs. Verral with a charming gesture of the long, white, waxen-like hands. "I never exert myself if I can help it. I dislike exertion excessively."

"Indeed!" remarked Mrs. Verral, a trifle coldly—for being an exceedingly active, busy woman herself she did not at all approve of others being idle and inert.

"Yes. I like a soft couch and an interesting book better than anything else."

"Then I suppose you don't ride, Madame Malvaizon?" inquired Miss Verral, in a very friendly way, to make up for her mother's coldness.

"No. I never cared for it. Too much exertion, too fatiguing."

"Nor play tennis?"

"No. I have never even had a racquet in my hand. It is too boisterous and rapid a game for me."

"Yes; if you don't care for exertion," and Gerlie, looking at her, could not fancy that tall, graceful figure flying hither and thither after a tennis ball with wildly flourished arms and a liberal display of ankle.

"I like driving."

"Yes. Have you any horses with you?"

"Only two ponies."

"The stables here would hold a good many more."

"They would, indeed. They are splendid!"

"You have already had wonders worked in the garden!" said Phyllis, timidly, who had been regarding the beautiful woman with a sort of awe mingled with fear—a fear that Paul, her Paul, should be bewitched by the lovely face.

"Do you think so? That old man, Clough, is a steady worker. The difficulty is to get him to stop. I fear he will kill himself with work."

"He is very hardy," put in Mrs. Verral, feeling she must say something.

"He looks so, and yet at his age it seems hard that he should be obliged to work."

"There are many older than he in the parish who have to work," observed Gerlie, thinking that possibly their tenant might interest herself in charitable work.

"Really. You surprise me!"

"The people are very poor about here, and there are not many to help them. The nearest house to this is Verral Dene, and our next neighbour, Hawtrey, of Bourne End, is two miles farther on."

"Indeed!" said Madame Malvaizon, looking rather pleased at this intelligence. "Then your neighbours are not likely to interfere with you much?"

"No. We don't see a great deal of them."

"This is a very quiet corner of Sussex," put in Mrs. Verral. "I hope you will not find it dull after Paris?"

"No. I shall like it."

"You will find it a great change from the gay French capital."

"Yes, a pleasant one. I passed part of my youth in a country place as quiet and secluded as this, and it is just what I delight in. I love the bees and the birds, and the flowers," and Madame's lovely eyes wandered away over the sunlit waters that heaved gently beneath the touch of the summer wind.

"I thought you liked flowers!" remarked Phyllis, wishing to be polite to Paul's tenant, and yet feeling that pain at her heart grew keener every minute; for how could any man look on this woman's perfect face unmoved?

"Yes. It is easy to think that," smiled Madame. "I like to make my room as much like a bower as possible."

"It is lovely!" murmured the girl, who loved Paul, realising what a charming background those red, yellow, and white roses made for that beautiful, queenly, blonde head.

"I trust you found my references in Paris satisfactory?" said the tenant of the Dower House, with curious suddenness, turning to Mrs. Verral, and fixing her dark eyes intently on her.

"Oh, yes, quite!" responded the widow, a trifle surprised by the abrupt way in which this question was asked.

"I trust in every way?" pursued the other.

"In every way, thanks!" responded Mrs. Verral, more graciously than she had yet spoken.

"I am so glad!" exclaimed Madame, with a sigh that was almost a gasp. "I like the place so much. It is secluded, peaceful, pretty. Exactly what I wished to find. I want to stay here. I do not want to go roaming about from place to place. It is so wretched. It makes me utterly miserable!" and to the surprise of her guests, Madame Malvaizon raised a dainty handkerchief to her eyes, and sobbed audibly.

"Oh, we hope you will stay here a long time!" said Gerlie, quickly; and as she spoke the door opened, and Morris glided in up to her mistress's side.

"On a *cervi*, Madame," she said, fixing her eyes on her mistress, who, withdrawing the handkerchief, met that gaze, and seemed instantly to recollect and control herself.

"Pardon my exhibition of weakness?" she murmured, to Mrs. Verral. "I—I am not very strong, and my lonely life—here—has—told a little on my nerves, charming though it is."

"Oh, pray don't mention it!" replied Mrs. Verral. "Your maid told me you were not strong. I trust the fine air here will strengthen you."

"Thanks, I have no doubt it will. This house is so charmingly situated. The breeze blows straight off the sea, and comes into the rooms laden with the sweet, salt freshness of the water."

"Yes."

"You must let me give you some tea!" she said, the next moment, in her usual graceful

way. "Morris tells me it is ready in the dining room," and she led the way thither, and was greeted by a little fluffy white dog, that climbed up to its mistress's arms by clinging on to her skirts in a wonderful way, while a splendid Persian cat came and rubbed itself against her feet, and a tiny marmoset monkey and a squirrel, who occupied a large cage near the window, showed evident signs of delight at seeing her, and flung themselves against the wires of the cage in their endeavours to get to her.

"I hope you do not mind animals?" she said, turning to her guests, and caressing the little dog with her white hand.

"Not at all!" said Gerlie, vivaciously. "We have quite a collection at The Dene, besides the farm animals."

"I see. How delightful it must be to farm, as I hear you do!" observed Madame, as she sat down at the table, and proceeded to pour out tea, while Morris took up her stand behind her mistress's chair, and handed about the cups and cakes, and did not once leave the room again while the visitors remained.

"We don't do it for pleasure," said Miss Verral, bluntly.

"No?"

"No; for profit. We send most of our produce to L—, and a little to the London markets."

"Then may I hope to have my things from your farm?" asked the tenant, inquiringly. "I should so much prefer it to having them down from town. Cream, eggs, and butter are so delightfully fresh when one gets them from a neighbouring farm!"

"Oh, yes," returned the irrepressible Gerlie, "we shall be very glad to send you anything you want if you send us a list over by Clough!"

"Thanks!" said the tenant, feeding the little dog with a sweet biscuit.

During this conversation Mrs. Verral sat rigidly upright, never uttering a word. It was gall and wormwood to her pride.

Wasn't it bad enough that she should have to let the Dower House, and now for the tenant to ask to have her butter and eggs sent from The Dene, just as though they kept a cheesemonger's shop? Oh, it was horrible! She felt herself choking with indignation, and rose to go the moment she had finished her cup of tea.

"Then I am to understand," she said, stiffly, as she shook hands with Madame Malvaizon, "that you are quite satisfied with the Dower House?"

"Quite," returned the tenant, warmly. "I am more than satisfied—charmed with it!"

"I am glad to hear it!" declared the widow, with a look and manner that belied her words, as she swept out into the glow and brilliance of the summer sunshine.

"My dearest, thou must be careful," said the Frenchwoman, warningly, as she heard her husband shut the hall-door on the departing visitors.

"Yes, yes, Morris. I know I must be very careful," agreed Madame, with hysterical haste. "I—I was not very foolish, was I, *ma Normandie*?" laying one waxen hand imploringly on her companion's arm.

"It looks a little *extraordinaire*, *ma la plus chère*," returned Mrs. Morris. "It well not do for that lady, Madame Verral, to suspect. She not like you much."

"No? Why do you think that?"

"From de way she look at you. She is half weeling to think there is something wrong with you *chérie*."

"And the others?" asked her mistress, with feverish haste.

"De pretty young lady was dazzled. She stare at you ver much. De ozer likes money, therefore likes you!"

"Thank Heaven, that even one is favourable to me. I do want to stay here so much. It suits me—it is so quiet and peaceful, so secluded. I feel safe here, nurse!" looking at the woman with a queer, startled expression in her deep blue eyes. "Safe! You under-



stand!" with a laugh that rang weirdly through the room. "Safe, safe! away from everyone. It seems like the end of the world!"

"Yes. You are safe here," rejoined Morris, soothingly, patting the hand that lay on her arm. "Quite safe, and we shall be very happy amongst de flowers, with de dog, and de animals, and your painting—very happy!" And the maid went on chatting gaily till her mistress had recovered her usual aspect, and seemed calm and content.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"You came, and the sun came after,  
And the green grew golden above,  
And the meadow-sweet shook with laughter,  
And the flower-flags lightened with love."

"Well, mater, what news of your ogress at the Castle?" asked Jack that evening, as he took his place at the foot of the table, and began to carve a fowl.

"My dear Paul, what a disgraceful way to speak of our tenant!" said Gertrude, with mock gravity.

"Isn't she an ogress, then?" demanded the young man, with that smile that lit up his face so pleasantly.

"I think she is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen!" said his mother with half reluctant, yet involuntary admiration.

"Really?" questioned the master of The Dene, pausing for the space of a second from his occupation of dissecting the biped, to look up at his vis-à-vis, and see if she were really in earnest.

"Yes," she admitted, still reluctantly, feeling an unaccountable desire not to praise this woman before her son, and yet being impelled to do so.

"She is very lovely!" said Phyllis, in a low tone.

"Here, here!" cried Paul, upsetting the gravy on to the cloth in his excitement. "The eighth wonder in the world. One young woman actually admitting that another is good-looking. By the way, though, is Madame Malvauxon young, or only a splendid ruin?"

"You had better go to the Dower House, and judge for yourself!" remarked Gertrude, dryly.

"No, Paul need not do that," said his mother, very hastily, "we can tell him all he wants to know!"

"Go ahead then, mater, and let me hear exactly what you think her age is?"

"Somewhere between five-and-twenty and thirty."

"Big or little?" he queried, as he lifted a foaming tankard of home-brewed, nut-brown ale to his lips.

"She is a tall woman, taller than I am, and finely developed."

"Dark or fair?"

"Very fair."

"With the exception of her eyebrows and lashes, which are black," put in Gertrude.

"And her hair?" asked Paul, with less banter and more seriousness, for the beautiful stranger who had interested him so much was big and fair, and he remembered having noticed the extraordinary length of her lashes, which made a dusky line on her fair cheek. Could she and his tenant be one and the same person, he wondered?

"Golden," cried Miss Verral.

"Dyed?" he queried, with a return to the cynical manner.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Phyllis, as though shocked at the mere idea of those beautiful tresses being indebted for their sheen and brightness to the perfumer's art.

"Certainly not," said his sister, decidedly. "It is natural, just the colour of ripened corn, and such masses of it! It must come below her waist when unbound."

"Then our tenant is a success in every way. Eh, mater?" looking across at his mother through the foathery fronds of a fern that decorated the centre of the table.

"I cannot say, my dear!" she returned, with unwonted gravity. "Time alone will show that."

"Well, really, mother," said Miss Verral, with a little sharpness, "I don't know what more you want. She has paid a year's rent in advance, she has put some lovely furniture and ornaments into the house, and surely you can't deny that she is very beautiful, and a perfect lady?"

"No, I cannot deny that, and yet," said Mrs. Verral, with some slight hesitation, "there is something curious about her—an intangible something that one knows, feels is there, and yet cannot take hold of."

"Oh, nonsense, mother!" exclaimed Gertrude. "I think she is perfect!"

"Granny is right, I think," chimed in Phyllis, who could not bear to hear her dearly-loved cousin and benefactress contradicted. "There is something curious about Madame Malvauxon. Her manner is exorbitant, and there is a startled look in her eyes now and then that strikes one as strange."

"It appears, Phyllis, as though you studied her rather closely?" remarked Gertrude.

"Yes, I did," acknowledged the girl.

"What a storm in a tea-cup our tenant has raised," laughed Paul. "Here comes Benson!" seeing the young farmer's burly figure loom in the distance, as he glanced out through the long French windows that stood open to let in the cool, flower-scented evening air. "You had better repeat it all over again for his benefit."

"No, I think we have had enough of Madame Malvauxon for to-night!" said Mrs. Verral, with decision, as she rose from the table, and went in to the drawing-room, which they always used in summer as a sitting-room in the evening.

The tenant of the Dower House was discussed no more at Verral Dene that night; but, nevertheless, Paul Verral's mind was full of her.

He felt an extraordinary desire to come face to face with this woman, who was described as so beautiful, because he thought she might be that woman whose deep, dark eyes had made such an impression on him.

He shouldered his gun early next morning, declaring that he had a fancy for a rook pie, and meant to knock some over. Still, he did not go to the rookery. He wandered off towards the downs, where he could have a good view of the quaint Dower House, as it lay bathed in the brilliant sunlight, its many-paned windows twinkling like eyes; and, leaning his arms on the muzzle of his gun, stood staring at it.

He was quite unconscious that this attitude displayed his fine figure to the greatest advantage, and he was also unconscious that a pair of eyes were studying him intently.

It was only the swift, swift of a woman's gown on the grass, and a low growl from the vagrant and irrepressible Pincher, that made him aware he was not alone in that lone spot.

Turning quickly, he saw coming towards him the beautiful stranger, more beautiful than ever, for there was the faintest tinge of rose-colour in her fair cheeks, and the wind had loosened the golden hair that strayed round her neck and ears and forehead in charming confusion.

She came straight towards him, holding out her hand with a smile that made her face—he thought—heavenly.

"I am sure you are Mr. Verral?" she said, in that sweet, musical voice he remembered so well—that seemed to have left its echo in his heart.

"Yes," he assented, lifting his hat as she approached. "I had no idea you were my tenant when we met before!"

"Nor I that you were my landlord! I have to thank you so much for letting me have the Dower House!"

"It is I who ought to thank you for taking it, and giving us the pleasure of your society!" he said, stoutly.

"No, no! Indeed, I am deeply grateful to you!" she declared, with curious insistence. "I have long been seeking such a place; and to find it at last, and become the possessor of it for a time, is an inexpressible relief and comfort to me!"

"I hope you find it comfortable?" remarked Paul, without much originality, but feeling just a little confused in the presence of this beautiful woman, whose face was as lovely as a poet's dream!

"Yes, it is charming! I only regret that there is no conservatory. I am so fond of flowers! It would be a constant source of pleasure and amusement to me in the winter as well as the summer!"

"A conservatory might easily be built at the side of the drawing-room," returned the young man, quickly, experiencing an insane and altogether ridiculous desire to gratify any wish of his tenant, no matter how ridiculous or outrageous.

"Oh! might I build one there?" she exclaimed, with evident pleasure at the idea, lifting her lovely eyes to his, sparkling as he had never seen them before.

"Certainly, if you wish. I ought to build it," he added, a moment later, gravely, wondering where on earth he should get the money from to do it with, "as it is my house, and you only have a tenancy of it."

"Oh, no, please let me do it?" she begged, earnestly. "I shall live such a quiet life here I shall not know how to get through my income unless I have some pet hobby to indulge."

"Would you really prefer to do it yourself?" he asked, fixing his frank, gray eyes on her face inquiringly.

"I would, really," she responded at once, with unmistakable eagerness. "If I have it all in my own hands I can carry out my own ideas. If you did it you might wish to carry out yours!"

"I don't think I should," he returned, a curious ring in his voice, as his eyes still fixed on her face took in greedily every dainty detail of outline and colouring. "Still, if you prefer to have the arrangement of the matter yourself, I can only say that you have a *carte blanche* from me to do just exactly as you please!"

"Am I right in supposing that the Dower House is yours, and not Mrs. Verral's?" she asked, with some hesitation, and the blue orbs she raised once more, to encounter the fixed gaze of his, no longer sparkled, but were full of their usual melancholy.

"It is mine!" he said, decidedly. "Mine to do just exactly what I like with. The only claim on it that my mother has is this: If I let The Dene, or—or—reddening rather at the thought of marriage and a wife, "if for any reason I should not wish her to live there, then I am bound, by the terms of my father's will, to let my mother make her home at the Dower House."

"I see," said Madame Malvauxon, slowly.

"As far as any buildings or alterations go they are my affairs entirely, so as soon as you wish you can begin the conservatory."

"You are very kind!" she said, softly; "and will you add to your kindness by letting me know who are the best people in the country to employ, and, if I may trespass so far on your time by pointing out to me the exact spot where you think it should be, and its dimension, etc."

"I shall be delighted to help you in any way that I can!" he told her, cordially. "The best people are Newton & Co., of L—. They are thorough in their work, and reliable."

"I will write to them to-day; and when you have half-an-hour to spare, Mr. Verral, will you come in and give me your valuable assistance as to site, etc?"

"I won't come in now," he said, with a glance at his shooting-coat and gun; "but to-morrow afternoon, if I may, I will come with pleasure!"

"Thank you. I shall be at home all the afternoon," and then she turned, and walked

slowly away towards the Dower House, her black dress making a soft *frou-frou* on the short grass, the steady sunshine gleaming on the golden hair, that looked like threads of precious metal, as it rested in a heavy coil at the nape of her white neck.

Paul Verral stood gazing after her, indifferent to the loud, noisy yaps of Pincher, who thought it was quite time to go towards home in search of some light refreshment in the shape of bones, and who, not being overcome by Madame's beauty, saw no reason to stand there gazing after her.

As to Paul, he stood there till she disappeared through the gloomy portal of the old place; then drawing a sharp, uneven breath the young man walked away, feeling as though under a spell, a glamour which he had never experienced before in all his eight-and-twenty years.

"Mother," he said, rather abruptly, after luncheon was over, and Gertie and Phyllis had gone out to the garden to see if the peaches were ripening on the south wall, "I met our tenant on the downs this morning, and she stopped me to ask permission to make some alterations at the Dower House."

"Did she, my dear?" she returned, a ring of surprise in her well-bred tones.

"Yes. She wishes to build a conservatory, as she is so fond of flowers."

"And did you give the necessary permission, Paul?"

"Yes, mother. I gave her permission. There could be no possible objection to it, could there?"

"No. No possible objection," echoed Mrs. Verral; and yet she found herself wishing that their tenant had not developed this fancy for a glass-house, and she might, possibly would, have felt a good deal more irrepudiation had she known that her dearly-loved son had made an appointment to call on Madame Malvaizon the following afternoon.

Manlike, he said nothing about that. He felt a curious reluctance to discuss his tenant with his mother, or to mention that he was going to her house. He felt intuitively that Mrs. Verral did not admire Madame Malvaizon quite as much as he did, and he wisely, though perhaps not quite frankly, abstained from informing her of his projected visit, thereby sparing the widow some uneasy hours, and keeping his secret delightfully close, and all to himself, which gave him a curious and uncommon sense of pleasure.

## CHAPTER VI.

"And then with a stroke of his shining sword

He will slay the dragons that guard the gate,

While the barriers fall with a swift accord,

And he climbs the stair with step elate

To the room of one who was doomed to wait

Through the weary years—who can speak no word.

Who can only stretch out her hands and weep,

And laugh by turns in a strange, wild way,

And shiver a little and sob, and creep

To the shelt'ring arms that seem to say,

Love, you are safe, you are mine always,

This is your resting-place, fall asleep!"

PAUL had some little trouble in escaping from his womenfolk the next afternoon.

Gertie wanted him to see some new fowls of a curious breed that had been sent to her. Phyllis consulted him with grave anxiety about Star, who had strained his leg. Mrs. Verral asked him to look over some accounts that she could not get right, and so it was full four o'clock before he was free to set out to the Dower House; and then, as he was keeping his visit a secret, he could not don decent black broadcloth and a tall hat, or leave Pincher, who accompanied his master everywhere, behind, so he was fain to make the best of a tweed suit, and the straw hat he was in the habit of wearing on sunny days, and to let the irrepressible one yap at his heels, when he was not scourrying after the helpless bunnies.

There was no one in the garden on the

verge of the cliff when he reached it, not even old Clough, a circumstance at which he was rather relieved, and the house looked deserted. Yet, after his pealing ring at the bell, answered by Mrs. Morris, he was told Madame was "at home," and was ushered into the drawing-room, where she was lounging in an easy-chair, covered by a fur rug, with, as usual, a perfect background of lovely vivid-hued blossoms.

"How kind of you to come!" she exclaimed, impulsively, rising to greet him.

"It is kind of you to receive me," he told her, a flush of pleasure rising to his bronzed cheek at her welcome, which was full of a subtle flattery, pleasing to the masculine soul.

"I have so few visitors. It is a pleasure to have some one to talk to. One cannot converse much with one's servants."

"No. As a rule, they don't prove intellectual."

"No. Still some of them make up for their want of intellect by fidelity—Morris, for instance."

"Has she been with you long?" he inquired, interestedly, feeling he should like to know the history of this beautiful woman.

"Ever since I came into the world. She was my mother's maid, and then my nurse, and she has served me always most faithfully and honestly."

"Quite a treasure to possess!" smiled Paul, as he fondled little Fifi, who had crept up on his knee.

"She is to me," assented Madame, with a little sigh. "Oh, Fifi," seeing the dog, "you must not torment my visitor. Let me take her, Mr. Verral! She will cover you with hairs."

"It doesn't matter," he rejoined, with an utter disregard for the truth. "They won't show on this coat."

"Still, she worries you."

"No. Dogs never worry me. I like them too well."

"Still, you have left yours outside," as Pincher's pitiful whines, as he scratched at the door, fell on her ear.

"Naturally. He would make a meal of this little thing if he came in."

"I think not. She won't attack him again. At any rate, we will try the experiment," and before he could stop her she was out in the hall speeding towards the door.

But in a moment he had followed her, and came up with her as she grasped the handle to open it, his hand falling on hers, and he thrilled at the touch with a delicious sensation, as he touched the soft warm skin.

"He is very rough, Madame Malvaizon, and ill-mannered. I think he had better not come in."

"Do let him. It seems unkind to leave him out here."

"But—if he proves himself a savage towards Fifi," looking down into the upraised blue orbs, and still keeping his hand on hers.

"He will not, I am sure. Let him in."

"I hope he won't abuse your confidence in him," laughed Verral, as she drew away and he turned the handle, letting in the terrier, who leaped and fawned on his master.

"No, he won't; will you, Pincher?" to the dog, who came and performed a series of comical little wriggles at her feet to show his gratitude. "You mustn't touch my Fifi," as they went back to the drawing-room, holding up a slender forefinger warningly.

"You'll go out if you do, sir," cried his master, rather savagely, whereupon Pincher, being endowed with more intelligence than most of his kind, sniffed gently and deferentially at Fifi's pink nose, and offered to do her no harm, lying down beside her after a while on the bear rug with perfect amity.

"You see I am right!" said Madame, with a pretty little air of triumph.

"I am sure you always are," returned Paul, courteously.

"Oh, no! Not always," she told him, sadly. "No one can always be right!"

"Yet I should think you very often are," and the look that accompanied it might have told Madame how deep the impression was she had made on this young man, only she did not see it. She was staring dreamily away over the sea, where white-winged vessels were gliding along, and the gulls wheeled and circled, their pinions appearing as though tipped with gold in the sunlight.

"You like this room?" he remarked, tentatively, after a pause, during which he had never once taken his eyes off the beautiful face.

"Yes, better than any other in the house. The view is charming!"

"And it will be better when the conservatory is built?" he smiled. "Won't it?"

"Oh, yes. Perfect then! Come and give me your ideas on the subject," she said, rising; and together they went out to the garden, and he, being a clever draughtsman, pencilled a sketch for her, and showed her where he thought it ought to be. And after an hour, which passed very quickly to both, she insisted on his coming in and having some tea, and as by this time they were excellent friends, and all stiffness between them vanished, he went into the dining room, where tea was served, and where Pincher had a sharp skirmish with the leviathan Persian cat, in the course of which he got considerably worsted, and retired under the table to nurse his wounds in silence, while his master lounged in an easy chair, and drank tea, and looked at his lovely hostess, and became every moment more and more a slave to her rare loveliness.

"I wonder why she always wears black?" he thought, as he watched the taper waxen fingers flatter about the teapot. "I should like to see her in white. Wonder whether she'd look too big in it? No; just lovely! If it were something thin, that would reveal a glimpse of her throat and arms, warmly pink through the snowy folds! What a fine profile! What sweet eyes, but so sad. I should like to chase the shadows away! Ugh! He'll be a lucky man who wins her!" and then he pulled himself together, and listened to his hostess's remarks with polite attention.

Two days later Madame Malvaizon walked over to The Dane to return Mrs. Verral's visit.

The afternoon was hot, and for her it was quite a long walk, and when she arrived she found they were all out; and turning rather wearily to retrace her steps she found herself face to face with Paul Verral, in an old shooting jacket, a gun over his shoulder, a bundle of rooks in his hand, and the inevitable Pincher at his heels.

"I am so sorry my mother is out, Madame Malvaizon!" he said, doffing his cap. "She and the girls have gone over to L— on a shopping expedition."

"I am sorry, too," returned Madame, with apparent sincerity.

"You will come in, though?" he went on, rather eagerly, "and I will tell the servants to get you some tea?"

"No, thank you. I will not come in," she answered, gently.

"Oh, do! No? Really not? Well, at least come and look at the farm buildings if you are not too tired!" noticing that she looked paler than usual.

At first she refused, but at last allowed herself to be persuaded to go over the farm, and showed a great interest in all the live stock, and the big, cool, dairy, with its rows of shallow pans, full of rich, creamy milk; and the afternoon was nearly over when she began to retrace her steps to the Dower House, accompanied, of course, by Paul. It was a lovely evening; the western heavens were full of a clear, golden-red light, flecked here and there with purple, mauve and pink bars of gold.

The soft wind that swept by was sweet with the perfume of many blossoms, and the fresh salt savour of the sea, and blew the fairy-like thistledown hither and thither at its will, and rustled the long grasses, where the



gold-centred daisies nestled, and the gaudy buttercups, and the newly-ripened grain, with its embellishment of purple charlocks and scarlet poppies.

The rooks, looking ruddy in the sun-glow, were hastening homeward, and a heron was sailing overhead with its long legs trailing behind, and the larks, thrushes, finches, sparrows, and other denizens of the hedgerows were all seeking their nests; and the busy hum of the multitudinous insects of summer life was growing fainter as they reached the Dower House.

"May I come and see you again soon?" he asked, very eagerly, still holding the hand she had given him as he said adieu.

"Yes," was all she seemed to find to say; but the look she gave him from those splendid deep blue eyes was enough for the young man, and sent him home madly happy, with his pulses beating in riotous fashion, and his brain full of fond fancies, in which his tenant figured largely.

"It is only the first step that costs," and, indeed, that was the case in the acquaintance of Gabrielle Malvaizon and Paul Verral.

After that first visit of his to the Dower House three days never went by without his being there, and by degrees his visits became of daily occurrence.

Of course it was the conservatory. At least, that is what he told himself. It would not do to let his tenant be imposed on by the work-people. It was his duty, as her landlord, especially as she was laying out her money to improve his property, to see that everything was done in the best style, and without any unnecessary delay; and he certainly kept the men at it, and got the coveted glasshouse finished in a marvellously short time, thereby gaining the fair Gabrielle's warmest thanks, and by the time that was finished there was no longer any necessity for making excuses at the Dower House.

He knew he was welcome, and would swing himself in at the dining-room window, soaring the cat and the dog, and flarrying the squirrel and the monkey, only to be received by their mistress with the most flattering and plainly-shown marks of pleasure.

Mrs. Verral for a long time remained in happy ignorance of her son's frequent visits to his lovely tenant. She was very much occupied. It was harvest time, the busiest part of the year, and then Gertie had accepted young Benson, and was going to be married to him in September; so the widow was occupied with this, to her great trouble, and for the time did not give much thought to her son, and Gertie being occupied with her trousseau and own love affairs, naturally did not bother her head much about his.

It was only Phyllis, whose eyes, sharpened to abnormal keenness by unrequited love, saw and understood all—understood that she had lost Paul, the man, who, but for the coming of this stranger, might one day have been her lover, her husband!

She was too proud to say anything to show that she noticed how often her cousin's footsteps took the direction of the cliffs. She would rather have died than have uttered one word.

Alone she bore her load of misery, and silently repressing every sign of outward grief she could.

Only it showed in her heavy eyes, languid step, and pale cheeks. The riant face lost a great deal of its brightness, the pomegranate hue faded from lip and cheek. She became little more than the ghost of her former self; and yet so gay did she appear before the family at The Dene, so lively were her sallies, so ringing her laughter, that no one thought it was anything more than the hot weather which had tried her a little.

It was only when alone in her own room that she gave vent to the pent-up anguish that was consuming her like an inward fire.

There she would fling herself face down-

wards on the bare boards, and writhe and pant, while a storm of convulsive sobs shook the slender form, and seemed to rend her with their violence.

She would pray to Heaven in most impassioned terms to let her die, and then beg with equal intensity to give her back her lost love—to let her once more be happy!

Her nights were full of unrest and unhappiness, and yet she was always first at the breakfast-table—always had a smile on her lips, a gay word of greeting for her cousins.

Still she no longer took the trouble to put on the bright coquettish gowns that Paul had often admired. Where would be the use? He would not notice them now. He had eyes only for Madame Malvaizon.

Neither did she care to go into the harvest-field, or sit under the heavy shocks of golden wheat, and watch the men as they cut down the ripened grain, for Paul never lingered there now. He would overlook the men for a short time, and then stroll on to the Dower House.

And how eagerly the mistress of it looked for his coming—an eagerness that was, perhaps, unknown to herself, though good Nurse Morris saw it, and groaned inwardly with bitterness of spirit, for she dreaded how it all might end, and how it would be for her darling nursing, even supposing this young man did honestly love her, and was not only amusing himself with her mistress, as she half feared. However, her fears on that point were ere long set at rest.

Mr. Verral called one afternoon, and in his usual unceremonious fashion swung himself in through the dining-room window.

But though the cat was there, and came to greet him, and the monkey and squirrel hopped about, and on the table lay a piece of embroidery, wrought in lifelike colours by Madame's delicate fingers, there was no sign of her anywhere. So Paul went into the hall and shouted for Morris, who came up in no end of a hurry.

"Is your mistress not in?"

"No, sir," replied the man, with a grin and a scrape. "She went out at six o'clock, and hasn't come back since."

"Do you know where she went?" asked Verral.

"She said she was going to Dingley Woods, sir."

"Is your wife with her?" inquired Paul, thinking it would be little use for him to take a long walk in search of his fair tenant if her almost inseparable companion, the maid, were with her—Mrs. Morris having often made the "odd man out" when he had met them walking, and he was quite of opinion that

"Two's company,  
Three trumpany."

It was often, however, that Gabrielle went out alone.

"No, sir! My wife is here. But she is just dressing to go down to the woods, and walk back with Madame."

"Tell her I will go!" said the young man quickly. "I want a walk," and without waiting to hear another word he turned back into the room, seeming to have an objection to going in the orthodox way, through the door, and swung himself out of the window, walking off swiftly to the dark, green patch of leafage that showed where the wood ran. He had penetrated some way into its leafy recesses before he saw the object of his search.

She was sitting on the twisted roots of an old oak, her elbows on her knees, her face supported on the palms of her hands, and her lips were moving rapidly, though he could hear no words issue from them. The little dog Fifi was crouching at her feet, apparently terrified.

As Paul laid his hand on her shoulder she sprang up with a loud scream, and stood looking at him, an expression of deadly terror in

her blue eyes, her white lips parted, her breast heaving.

"Don't be frightened, Gabrielle!" he said, quickly, astonished at this display of fear. "It is only I, Paul Verral!"

"Paul Verral," she repeated in curious, hushed tones, and then, though suddenly remembering! "Oh, Mr. Verral, you startled me so much, I was deep in thought. I—I did not know you."

"I am so sorry," he said, penitently. "I did not mean to startle you. I thought you heard me coming. Will you forgive me?"

"Yes, yes, of course," she returned quickly, putting her bare hands into his outstretched ones.

"You must come home at once!" he said authoritatively, as he felt how she trembled. "It is damp and cold in these woods after sundown, and you are too lightly clad!" looking at the thin, black dress, through the gauzy texture of which her arms and shoulders gleamed whitely.

"Yes, I will come!" she said obediently, as he drew her hand through his arm, "I did not mean to stay out so late."

"You must not do it again," he told her, pressing the hand resting lightly on his arm against his side, and she could feel the heavy throbs of his heart as he held it there.

"No, I will not," she whispered, with one shy, swift glance up into his face; and then they walked on in silence—a sweet, subtle silence—full of delight to both.

Just as they reached the edge of the wood there was a zig-zag flash of lightning, followed by a terrific peal of thunder. The storm that had been brewing all day suddenly broke overhead, and as the flash dazzled Madame's eyes she turned with a shriek, and flung herself into Paul's arms, hiding her face on his breast, and moaning pitifully.

"Don't be frightened, Gabrielle!" he said, soothingly. "You are quite safe with me. Here under this thick bush we shall escape the rain, and be out of reach of the lightning!" and he drew her down beside him in a hollow, underneath a huge bush, and soothed her with most tender endearments while she knelt beside him, his arms around her, her face buried in his breast, trembling violently as each mighty peal broke overhead.

To him the situation was full of charm. He held in his arms the woman he adored. She clung to him with despairing energy; and they were as much alone, as much isolated, as if they had been on a desert island.

The perfume from her beautiful hair intoxicated his senses every time she trembled; it sent a thrill through his body. He felt mad when he bent down to soothe her terrors, and his lips rested on her cheek.

"You are safe, my own darling, in my arms! Don't tremble so!" he said, again and again; but until the thunder died away in the distance she continued to shiver and show signs of terror.

"The storm is over now!" he said at last, very reluctantly, when the last vestige of the furious wrack had passed away.

"Then let us get home at once!" she gasped.

"Yes, dearest! Lean on me all your weight!" and he put his arm round her, and almost carried her along, tall and heavy though she was.

But Paul Verral could have carried a heavier weight than Gabrielle Malvaizon, with his blood running like quicksilver through his veins. To him she seemed a mere feather-weight.

"Good-night, my own beloved!" he murmured, passionately, as they stood at length on the steps of the Dower House. "Kiss me once?" and he drooped his head till his lips lay on hers, and drew her arms about his throat, and held her close to him for one rapturous moment before the door opened, and he gave her over to the care of Mrs. Morris.

## CHAPTER VII.

"Break, break, break

At the foot of thy crags, O sea!

But the tender grace of a day that is dead

Will never come back to me!"

PAUL was at the Dover House the next morning before twelve o'clock. He was anxious to ascertain in what position he stood to his lovely mistress.

There had been no asking in marriage, no promise given by Gabrielle; and his hot, mad infatuation would not let him rest until he had heard from her sweet lips the words that would make her his for all time.

She was sitting in a low chair by the window, gazing out over the sea—a very favourite occupation of hers, and one of which Mrs. Verral highly disapproved, for that energetic lady thought it almost sinful to sit doing nothing, wasting the precious minutes that might be profitably occupied; and she half turned as Paul entered, and then sank back in her chair, covering her face with her hands, as though ashamed to meet his gaze.

In an instant he was kneeling beside her, with both arms round her.

"Gabrielle, my dearest! I don't shrink from me!" he exclaimed, passionately, drawing her close to him, despite her feeble struggles. "You know I love you! you must have known it all these happy hours that we have spent together! I was afraid to speak before! I afraid lest I should offend you, and lose even your friendship! But yesterday I could not control myself! I let you see all I felt for you! You know now, if you did not before, and so I speak! You will be my wife, dearest! My own beloved wife?"

"No! no!" she cried then, forcing herself back a little from him so that she could look up in his face, and he saw the lovely eyes were dim with tears. "Oh, Heaven! you don't know what you ask!"

"It is a great deal," he said, humbly, removing his arm from her waist, yet still holding her hands. "Still, I thought if you loved me you would say 'yes,' and his pleading eyes sought hers very tenderly.

"If I loved you!" she echoed, throwing up her head with a wild burst of laughter that echoed weirdly through the long room. "If!"

"And do you?" he asked, in a determined way, as though he meant to have an answer at any cost.

"Do I? Listen, Paul Verral!" she said, with passionate intentness, that robbed her sweet voice of some of its music. "I love you madly! wildly! blindly! I, who have never given a thought to any living man, have given my whole heart and soul to you! With you, the night is day! without you, day night! You are the best part of my life! My life outside yours is a blank! You are the light of it! Is that enough for you?" she asked, almost fiercely, raising a pair of blazing orbs to his, that burnt with a feverish light, that in cooler moments he might have thought strange, but which passed unnoticed then.

"It is enough for me in one way, not in another!" he rejoined, coolly, once more passing his arm round her, and this time in a masterful, determined manner, for now that she had confessed her love he felt sure of her.

"What do you mean?" she asked, quickly. "I am satisfied that you love me; but—you must be my wife!"

"Oh! I cannot! I cannot!" she exclaimed, putting her hands against his breast, and trying to push him away.

"You must! you shall!" he said, doggedly. "I must not! indeed—indeed I must not!"

"Indeed, you shall! Here," drawing her up from the chair on to his breast, "heart to heart, tell me that you will be mine!"

"Paul, pity me! be generous!" she murmured, brokenly.

"It is for you to be generous, my dearest!" he told her, fondly, holding her so close, in so passionate a way, that he hurt her. "It is for

you to bestow upon me that which I covet more than anything else on earth!"

"I dare not! Don't ask me!" she moaned, the hot tears rolling down her pale cheeks, and falling on his breast.

"What folly is this?" he asked, wrathfully, tightening his violike grip until she nearly fainted. "Am I to lose my heart's desire for some childish whim of yours?"

"It is no whim!" she murmured, sadly.

"There is an obstacle between us!"

"Then I will surmount it!" he said, masterfully.

"There is—something I ought to—tell—you!" she went on, hesitatingly, "something that would make you dread and fear me!"

"Then don't tell it me!" he said at once.

"Your past is your own. I do not seek to know it. I wish to hear nothing concerning you that could shake or alter my love! You care for me—you have said so—and that you have never loved any other man; that is enough! You shall be my wife!"

"Oh, Paul, spare me and—yourself!" she whispered, feeling her determination giving way beneath the fury and storm of his passion.

"I might spare you, darling, never myself!"

"Why, Gabrielle!" he cried, a minute later, "do you realize, understand, what my love for you is? As there is a Heaven above us, if you refuse me, I will go and shoot myself like a dog—I shall have nothing left to live for!"

"Oh, Paul!" she exclaimed, with a shudder, twining her arms round his throat, as though to keep him from putting his rash threat into execution.

"Now will you marry me?" he asked, fiercely, holding her away from him, his eyes fixed gloomily on the lovely pale face and drooped head.

"Yes!" she murmured, almost inaudibly; and he caught her to him, bruising her face and lips with his violent kisses.

So Paul Verral signed his own death-warrant!

It was late in the evening when the young man left the Dover House, where he had spent some hours of unalloyed pleasure with his future wife; and he had no sooner gone than Madame Malvaizon went up to her bedroom, where Morris was busy getting her bath ready.

"M'sieu Verral was here a long time this day, *ma chérie*!" she said, quietly, as she brushed out the long golden hair.

"Yes, *ma Nourrice*. I have been so happy," sighed her mistress, with a little ecstatic sigh.

"And why, *chère madame*?"

"Because to-day I promised to be his wife!"

"Ah!"

The Frenchwoman dropped the silver brush she was wielding with such skill, and a dusky flush rose to her swarthy face, and an anxious look to her eyes.

"You—you—told him—all?" she said, after a long pause, looking anxiously at Gabrielle's fair face.

"I tried to, but he would not listen; and, oh! nurse, I was so glad. I feared that if I told him he would leave me, and I do so want to be happy, really happy!"

"You should tell him, my dearest!"

"He would not listen. Oh! Morris, why am I not like other women, free to love and wed when and where they will?" and her great eyes filled with melancholy, and the rose flush faded from her cheeks, leaving them snow-white, while her eyes dilated and grew bright and restless.

"The sins of the fathers!" groaned the Frenchwoman; but she said no more on the subject to her mistress, only talked soothingly, and crooned a lullaby after she was in bed, as one do to a child.

Paul did not communicate the news of his engagement to his family until the next

morning, and then it was better received than he expected it would be.

Mrs. Verral was not altogether pleased, for had she been allowed a voice in the matter she would have chosen another style of woman to be her son's wife, and one of whom they knew more.

Still, Madame Malvaizon had a good income, and she was a lady, and Paul was very much in love, and a determined man to boot.

So she made the best of it, and smiled, and declared herself ready to call on her daughter-in-law that was to be that very day, while Gertie was extremely and unfeignedly pleased, more especially as Madame Malvaizon had sent her a splendid wedding present only a few days before; and even Phyllis congratulated him in a very pretty fashion, and with apparent cordiality, though her heart felt fit to break with its load of woe.

And so all went merry as a marriage bell, and the newly-affianced lovers spent some delightful hours together, strolling in the quaint garden around the Dover House, or sitting in the pretty drawing-room, that Madame's taste had so wonderfully transformed, or loitering in the conservatory amid the tropical and rich-hued flowers. And then the marriage bells did ring out in reality, for Gertie's wedding-day arrived, and she and Bob Benson were made one, and went off for a honeymoon amongst the Swiss mountains and lakes; and then, as they were disposed of, Mrs. Verral turned her attention to this other wedding, which was fixed to take place in the middle of November. And very busy she was, making shirts for Paul, and seeing that his trousseau was all *comme il faut*, for she rightly doubted Gabrielle's capacity for sock-knitting and shirt-making, and resolved that her son should be well supplied with necessities before he left The Dene, for the usual order of things in the Verral family was to be reversed.

She was to remain at The Dene, while Paul and his wife were to live at The Dover House.

Gabrielle preferred that arrangement, and of course her word was law to her lover, as a woman's word always is, until the fatal knot is tied, which makes such a vast difference in a man's opinions, and transforms the woman, in his idea, from a hour to a fiend.

The day before his wedding Paul went for his last bachelor spin across country with the hounds, for Gabrielle had told him she was too busy to receive him until the evening, and enjoyed it, though he was a little worried, for during the last week his love's manner to him had been capricious and wayward, and once or twice, when he had offered to kiss her, she had repulsed him, as though he was distasteful to her.

This weighed down his usually good spirits, and he felt depressed as he rode homeward in the evening, or, rather, rode towards the Dover House, for he went to spend an hour with Gabrielle before going on to The Dene. He did not take his horse to the nurse's stable, but tethered him at the gate, and walked into the drawing-room, as usual, unannounced.

Madame Malvaizon was pacing up and down, clad in a long, white dress, of some thick, soft, material, trimmed with white fur; her face was very pale, and her eyes shone feverishly.

"So you have come at last!" she remarked, in harsh tones as he entered, without, however, vouchsafing him any further greeting.

"Yes, dearest!" he said, advancing into the middle of the room and taking one of her hot, reluctant hands in his. "We had a long run to-day. I could not get back before!"

"How I hate hunting!" she cried, with sudden fierceness, stamping her foot.

"Hounds, horses, all!"

"Gabrielle!" he exclaimed, surprised at her manner.

"Yes, I do. I hate it all—all!"

"Well—I will give it up if you dislike it so much," he said with an effort, "when we are married."



"When we are married!" she echoed, in curious tones. "And when will that be, pray?" fixing her large eyes wildly on his.

"Why, to-morrow, Gabrielle. Surely, you know that?"

"And is everything—settled?"

"Yes; everything!"

"And—we must be married to-morrow?"

"Why, yes, dearest, unless you have changed your mind."

"I know a way out of it," she muttered to herself. "Come, come with me," and he, willing to humour her, followed into the conservatory, where she threw open a door, and stepped out on the lawn, into a flood of silver moonlight.

"So," she said, coming up close to him as he followed her, "we are to be married to-morrow?"

"Yes, dearest!" he answered, rather bewildered at her tone and bearing.

"Hal hal!" she laughed, a horrible blood-curdling laugh, that chilled him, and made the first terrible doubt of her sanity flash across his mind. "Are we! I will not wed you. Your bride is death. Go seek her in the grave," and quick as thought she plucked a dagger from her bosom, and struck him in the breast—the long, thin, keen blade driving downwards till it touched the true, honest heart that beat only for her.

With one deep groan the unhappy young man fell at her feet a corpse, and lay there motionless, his white face turned up to Heaven, looking grim and stern in the silvery moonbeams, the red stream welling out and forming a ghastly pool on the smooth turf, while his pink hunting-coat was deeply stained, and his murderer's white hands.

As midnight struck, Mrs. Morris, heedful of the morrow, broke her usual rule of never disturbing the lovers, and approached the drawing-room to enter it. She heard a voice or voices continually talking, and knocked before entering. But no notice being taken of her signal, at last she turned the handle and entered.

There, sitting in the middle of the room, talking to herself and wiping her hands, was Gabrielle Malvaizon; and the Frenchwoman needed but one look at the reddened hands and the tell-tale splashes on the white gown to know that a terrible tragedy had been enacted.

Her scream of horror soon brought her husband, and together they rushed out to the lawn, only to find poor Paul beyond human aid, slain by the hand he loved best in all the world.

At the inquest the whole miserable story came out. Mrs. Morris, *née* Celeste Martine, told how her mistress, Gabrielle's mother, after a sojourn in France of some months with friends had met and married the handsome and wealthy Monsieur Malvaizon, who, three years after marriage, attempted to murder his wife, and then killed himself in a fit of homicidal frenzy, to which all the members of his family were subject.

Berthe Malvaizon, never recovering from the shock of her husband's terrible death, died a few years after, leaving her little girl, Jeanne Gabrielle, to the care of her only living relatives, Squire Treleven and his son John.

Mrs. Morris detailed their brutal and unprincipled endeavours to get the girl's money by forcing her to marry John Treleven, and her horror and repugnance at the idea which brought out symptoms of the homicidal mania of her father's family; and told how they had fled away like thieves in the night and over to France, where they had wandered from place to place, hiding from the Trelevens, until, when in Paris, they heard that they had come there to live in order to watch for Gabrielle, and then how she had fled back to England, and seeing the advertisement of the Dower House, took it, hoping there to find rest and peace.

The Frenchwoman declared her mistress adored her lover, and killed him in a fit of excitement, which brought out the latent madness that had laid dormant for ten years. She fancied he was the hated man her guardian had tried to force on her before she was of age.

The witness was severely censured for not having warned the unfortunate young man of his peril. But with streaming eyes she declared she could not betray her darling, rob her of the only happiness she had known in her sad life, more especially as Mr. Verral had said that he would kill himself if her mistress did not marry him.

Mrs. Verral's grief was terrible to witness. She reproached herself bitterly for having consented to let the Dower House, and called herself her son's murderer. In a few days she became a mere wreck of her former self, and looked an old, broken-down woman; and Phyllis, putting aside her own deep sorrow with a resolute hand in the face of this deeper maternal anguish her cousin displayed, and taking the place vacated by Gertrude, devoted her life to the widowed, forlorn, hopeless mother of the man she had loved "not wisely, but too well."

In a criminal lunatic asylum, "detained during Her Majesty's pleasure," is a tall and very beautiful woman, who sits all day long trying to wipe blood stains off her hands and muttering to herself. She is known there only by a number. But once in the world she was called Gabrielle Malvaizon.

[THE END.]

## DELIA'S FORTUNE.

—O—

It was a dull grey afternoon in that dreariest of all months, February. The slopes and hollows of Borrow Hill were covered with snow; the leafless copses shuddered in the wind, and John Eames wondered, as he often did, as he drove up the winding cart path, by courtesy called a road, what on earth kept Miss Grant's farm-house from blowing off into the chasms below, where, once upon a time, some ill-advised company had sunk shafts and mined away the shoulder of the hill in search of the iron ore that had never existed.

"I declare," said John, out aloud—he often talked to his horse when he had no other audience—"I'd as soon be a crow up atop of a tree than to live alone in a spot like this!"

Miss Grant herself was at the window—a little dried-up woman, with a knot of faded hair showered tight at the back of her head, and blue eyes that might once have been bright. She came swiftly to the door with a ducking motion like a bird, and opened it about an inch wide.

"I don't want any tinware to-day, thanks," said she.

John smiled a broad smile.

"Well, you hain't no objections to my coming in to warm myself?" said he. "Because it's a mortal cold day."

Miss Grant involuntarily wrapped a thin, old shawl closer about her thin, old shoulders.

"There's no fire," confessed she. "No fire! Land o' Goshen, why not? Is the coal run out?" he questioned.

The stalwart driver of the tin and willow ware waggon stared around him. Miss Grant's words were true. The poor little stove was cold; the coal place was empty.

"I see," said he. "The coals didn't hold out, and ye hain't no men folk to chop wood and haul it home. Well, I declare! How d'ye get along, anyhow?"

"I set with a shawl around me," said Delia Grant, with blue nose and chattering teeth. "I burned the old laylock bush yesterday that mother planted the year I was born. And I cut up father's rockin'-chair last week.

Please Heaven, it won't be quite so cold once we get past February."

Eames whistled under his breath.

"It ain't exactly summer weather in the month o' March on Borrow Hill," observed he. "P'r'aps, though, you could give me a drink o' milk?"

"There ain't none in the house," admitted Miss Grant, a patch of colour mounting to her lean cheek.

"A mouthful to eat? Come," chuckled the peddler, "I ain't partickler."

Miss Grant threw open the cupboard doors. Half a loaf of dry bread lay there on a bluedged plate cracked across the middle.

"When poverty comes in at the door pride flies out of the window," said she, evidently with an effort. "That's all I've got left in the world, John Eames. And that wouldn't be there only the cat fished in a rabbit last night, and I made a stew on't with the last o' the laylock branches."

Again John whistled.

"Be things as bad as that?" said he.

A little sob came into Miss Delia's throat.

"There ain't nothin' left for me but the workhouse," said she. "I've struggled along as far as I could, but my trade of dress-making don't seem to give satisfaction. I don't seem to be wanted no more in the world, and I guess I'll have to go to the wall. Our folks always had a mortal dread of the house, but it's better'n starvin' to death. There's a bottle o' rat-poison I flung down into the iron pits yesterday for fear I should be tempted to swallow it and put an end to my troubles!"

John Eames looked at her a moment. Then he went out and blanketed his horse.

"Give me the axe," said he, returning.

"I don't ask favours of any man," said the little old maid, shrinking into herself.

Without a word he swung the axe over his broad shoulder and strode off to the nearest patch of woods. Presently he returned with an armful of wood, and proceeded, by the aid of an old newspaper and some matches, to kindle a bright fire in the grate, Miss Grant looking on silently. Then he brought in some of the stock-in-trade.

"You need a new clothes-basket," said he.

"And some tin pans—and a new coffee pot!"

"I don't know when I'll be able to pay for them," said Delia, timidly.

John seated himself on the edge of the table.

"Delia Grant," said he, "you and I ain't young folks. Twenty years ago I liked you, and I haven't left off liking you yet. Twenty years ago I asked you to marry me, and you said you didn't fancy me enough for that."

"I know it," said Delia, faintly. "I—I was a fool."

"Now I ask you again. I haven't changed my mind. P'r'aps you've changed yours? We're both of us single. I need a good wife to keep me heartened up and mended, and kept in proper victuals. I guess by the look of things you need a man to fetch wood and water, and sort of patch up fences and windy-blinds. Come, Delia, what'd'ye say?"

She lifted her faded blue eyes questioningly to his face.

"You ain't saying all this out of pity?"

"No, I ain't. Honour bright! I'm saying it because I never've left off liking you since them days you said 'No.'"

"I won't say 'No' again," shyly spoke Delia, blushing as prettily as if she were eighteen instead of thirty-nine. The crackling heat in the old grate seemed to thaw out her heart as well as her finger ends.

"Then," said Eames, decisively, "We'll get married."

"Isn't it mighty sudden?" said Delia, coyly, fingering her apron strings.

"Younger folk might talk that a way," said the sedate bridegroom. "But me and you, Delia, we've got lots of lost time to make up for."

Delia's pinched little face was fairly radiant as she rode back again, after her wedding, to the farmhouse on the mountain, in the level

shine of the setting sun, with her new-made husband by her side.

"I didn't ever think to have a horse and trap of my own," nestling up to John's stalwart shoulder.

"Nor a husband neither, eh?" said he, chuckling. "Well, Delia, to speak truth, I've been proper lonesome of late boarding at Mrs. Smith's, and I do believe you and me together can make the old farm better than you could alone."

Delia moved a little closer.

"I wish," she whispered, "I was younger and better-looking for your sake, John."

"I'm quite satisfied as it is," said John, with a beaming glance at her. "Didn't I tell you I'd always liked you, Delia?"

So the oddly-assorted pair settled down in the old red farmhouse on the hill. Between the tinware business and the necessary work of the farm, to whose deserted barns he had added a plump Alderney cow, the horse, a pair of sleek porkers, and a colony of chickens, ducks, and turkeys, John Eames was kept busy, and Delia's housekeeping was a delight to his thrifty soul. But Delia would look wistfully after the cart as it rumbled down the hill with a clatter of tin and a squeaking of willow wares.

"He's done so much for me," said she. "And it seems as if I could do so little for him."

But one day, returning from his daily circuit, John found a letter on the table.

"The postmaster gave it to me as I drove by," said he. "I ain't jealous, Delia, but I would like to know who's writing to you from Scotland."

"I've got an uncle there," said Delia, "mother's youngest brother. There's a black sheep, you know, in every family, and we ain't heard nothing of him for years."

She opened the letter with trembling fingers, secretly hoping that the black sheep was not coming back to the family fold to quarter himself on patient John, just as they were beginning, as she phrased it in her heart, "to take solid comfort." She read the contents, then she looked up with dazed eyes into John's broad countenance.

"John," said she, "things happen awful strange. I've been sort of repining of late that you bought me new clothes and kept on wearing your own shabby things. Now I can do something for you. Uncle Ben is dead, and he's left me seven hundred pounds!"

"Seven hundred pounds!" To the unsophisticated John the sum seemed as much as seven thousand would have done to a business man. "Why, Delia, you're an heiress!"

"Now you can have something," said Delia, wiping her eyes. "A real, warm overcoat, another horse, and we can paint the house, and—oh, John, I'm so glad! Because you've done everything, and I haven't had a chance to do nothing."

"Hold on, Delia, hold on!" said the tinpeddler. "D'ye suppose I married you for money?"

"No," whispered Delia, "you married me because you loved me!"

And the middle-aged couple, sitting by the table where Delia had been making pies, were just as happy and just as romantic in their late blossoming love as Romeo and Juliet had been on the Italian shores, or Paul and Virginia under the palmetoes.

For Cupid recognizes no dates.

Some audacious persons, who, like Diderot, think they could have given "a wrinkle or two" if they had been consulted on the scheme of Creation, have cynically inquired, "What is the use of mosquitoes?" The answer has at last been given. "Persons newly arrived in Cuba are now inoculated against yellow fever by means of mosquitoes which have been contaminated by stinging a yellow-fevered patient." This surely beats Koch, and takes, for the present, the scientific cake.

## A GAME AT CARDS.

—O—

Mrs. Janet French was seated in her own especial arm-chair by the open grate fire, with a table before her, upon which were lying piles of playing-cards. Her face was intent, her eyes fastened upon the game, as she took the cards from a pack in her hand and put them, one by one, upon the various piles on the table.

Dr. Wells, her nephew, a tall, broad-shouldered man of thirty, sat opposite to her, the newspaper he had been reading lying on his knees, and his eyes, too, watching the game.

"Jack on the ten," he said; and his voice, coming loudly upon the profound silence, so startled the old lady that the cards in her hand fell upon the floor, as she looked up.

"Oh, what a shame!" the doctor cried, as he gathered up the scattered pieces of card-board. "It was almost out! By the way, Aunt Janet, don't you get dreadfully tired of playing 'Patience' every evening?"

"Sometimes! But I cannot read or sew by gaslight, and I get tired of knitting. I wish I knew some new games."

The doctor smiled. He had a little surprise in store for the old lady.

"I'll show you an entirely new one," he said, "one I invented last evening after you went to bed. We will call it 'The King's Reception.'"

As he spoke, he gathered up the cards upon the table, and began to shuffle them. Then, as he took them from the pack, he explained the combination he had planned, an ingenious variation upon the games he had seen his aunt play.

The old lady was delighted. It was even better than a knitting stitch, a new one of which had been her last pleasure.

"And you really invented it, Dick?" she said. "How clever and how kind, for I am sure it was only to please me!"

"I would do much more than that to please you, Aunt Janet," he said; but the words touched upon a tender spot in the old lady's heart, and the tears suddenly gathered in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

"And yet you are going to New York," she sobbed, "and I may die before you come back!"

"I must go!" was the grave reply. "I would not leave you except for a positive duty, auntie. I will not stay one hour after my business is finished."

"And I shall have to send for Fred's girl. I always hated her mother! I know just what a silly piece of affection Mary French would have for a daughter!"

"Perhaps not. She may be like her father."

"Who died when she was two years' old. I thought I had done my duty by the child when I sent her to Mrs. Salt's school and had her educated for a teacher. I have left her £2,500 in my will."

"You ought to leave her at least half if not all your property," the doctor said, emphatically. "You have no one else but me to share it, and I have my father's money and my own profession. Nellie should have a home here while you live, and what you will leave."

"There! There! I've heard that opinion a hundred times already. You are very ungrateful!" with more tears.

"No, do not say that! I am most deeply grateful for a motherly love all my life, for a happy home, for a life free from care and trouble, Aunt Janet. What I owe you I can never repay. But the money—"

"Don't say any more. I'll have the girl here while you are in New York, since you insist upon it; but my money is my own, and I will leave it where I please. Now show me your game again! Kings in a square in the centre?"

And an hour was passed in studying the new combination.

A week later, in the same drawing room at

Riverslope on the Thames, Miss Janet was once more playing "Patience;" but Dr. Wells was on a Cunard steamer, outward bound, and in his place was seated a young girl of nineteen, with deep blue eyes and rich chestnut hair, a young likeness of the old lady opposite to her.

It was this likeness that first melted the coldness her aunt had always felt towards Nellie French, a dislike founded entirely upon the aversion she had felt for her brother's wife. But Nellie, she admitted, before the first day of her visit was over, was "all French," a quiet, gentle girl, entirely free from her mother's affectations.

Timid and shy at first, with the restraints of a strict boarding-school still upon her, Nellie soon became at home in her aunt's house, and with a tender, loving heart, soon found a hundred ways to make the old lady's life a brighter one. For fifteen years Miss Janet had been a sufferer from spinal trouble that made her a prisoner in two rooms—the drawing-room and the bedroom adjoining. Every morning her maid dressed her and put her in a deep-cushioned chair, which was then rolled into the drawing room. Here she had for years spent the day alone, excepting for friendly calls, occupying herself with books or needlework, while her nephew was making his round of professional calls.

It is not necessary here to explain the business that suddenly summoned Dr. Wells to England, but it was a call of duty, and likely to detain him for several months. His aunt had grieved and fretted herself almost sick at the prospect of loneliness, or the visit of a niece she was sure she would detest. And, to her joyful surprise, she found herself happier than she had been for years.

Grateful to her aunt for her education, for the legacy she had been informed she was to have, Nellie devoted herself to the task of making the long hours less tedious with marked success. She was not brilliantly accomplished, but she played well upon the piano, sang pleasingly in a sweet, not very powerful voice, and Miss Janet loved music. She played backgammon, *désique*, dominoes and chess, and was an adept at knitting. She taught Miss Janet lace-work, some new crochet stitches, and started a crazy quilt from a perfect mine of silk pieces hoarded away for years. She read aloud in a clear voice, pleasingly, without any effort at elocution, and Miss Janet dearly loved a good novel, while her own eyes would allow but very little reading.

The days flew by rapidly, and eight months of Doctor Wells' absence had passed, when suddenly Nellie French left Riverslope—just one week before the doctor returned to England. Business detained him in London, and he made only a flying visit to Riverslope, and returned to the city. For nearly three months Miss Janet was, indeed, alone; mourning for her niece, fretting for her nephew, until a telegram was sent to London by the physician who had taken Doctor Wells' practice when he went abroad:—

"Miss French is dangerously ill. Come as soon as possible."

Dangerously, fatally ill, the old lady lay, but perfectly conscious.

"You will stay, Dick?" she said, as he bent over her.

"Yes! I will not leave you again."

"And, by and by—you will find Nellie. I have done what you wished. I have left her this place and half my money. Dick, she is the dearest child in the world, gentle, loving and dutiful."

"But why is she not here? Surely, you need her now!"

"I sent her away. I was just an old idiot, Dick. I tried to make her promise to marry you—"

"Good gracious!" interrupted the doctor.

"Yes. I see now how silly I was. But I was sure you would love her when you saw her. And she is engaged to the teacher of drawing at Mrs. Salt's. She thinks he is a great artist, who will make a name if he can



ever earn money enough to have time to paint. Just now he is making a bare living for one as a drawing-teacher. I showed her the folly of such an engagement. I told her all your perfections and your prospects as my heir. She was as firm as a rock. She loved this drawing-teacher, and he loved her. Then I grew angry, and I told her to choose between giving him up and leaving the house, promising to cut her out of my will. She left the house. Oh, Dick! I did not think she would go. She wrote me the sweetest letter, thanking me for all I had done for her, assuring me of her love, and went away."

"Suppose I advertise that you are ill, and wish to see her?"

"Do so. Oh! if she was here now, to love me and nurse me, as I know she would! To-day, Dick, send the advertisement to the paper to-day."

Dr. Wells promised to do so, and kept his word. Every day for a month the appeal to "Nellie" appeared in three leading papers, but no answer came to the dying woman. Then there was a parting between Miss Janet and the nephew who had been like a son to her, a funeral, and Riverslope was closed, to wait for the heiress, while Dr. Wells went to London, and set up in that city.

Five years had passed since Miss Janet's death, when, one morning, Doctor Wells was called, in consultation by another physician, over a little child afflicted with some mysterious complaint.

"The mother is a widow, a music-teacher," Dr. Best told Dr. Wells, "and has lost one child, an infant, since her husband died. She has a hard struggle, for she is not very strong herself, but she is very brave and patient. Here we are!"

At the very top floor of a tall tenement-house they entered a small room, poorly furnished, but neatly kept in order. A pale, sweet-faced woman was seated by the fire, holding a child of three years old upon her lap.

"Mrs. Hastings," Dr. Best said, "this is the physician I promised would call to-day to see Freddie."

The child opened his eyes as he heard his name, and the examination was made, resulting in more encouragement than had been given to the mother. For three days the two physicians called together, and each day Dr. Wells was more impressed by the quiet patience, the deep tenderness of the young mother, more pained by the evident poverty she was suffering from. She had been obliged to give up her pupils to nurse her child, and both physicians were satisfied that she was enduring great privations.

It was in the evening of the fourth day that Dr. Wells received a note from his friend, asking him to call on Mrs. Hastings, as he was detained elsewhere. The door of the room stood open when Dr. Wells reached the landing, and Freddie was sleeping. The light in the room was very dim, and Mrs. Hastings, seated with her back to the door, was playing "Patience." Dr. Wells could see the cards as she put them, one by one, upon the child's low bed. Kings in the centre! She was playing the game he had invented for his Aunt Janet! He stepped softly inside the room, watched the cards until he was sure there was no mistake, and then rapped lightly on the door.

Mrs. Hastings rose quickly.

"A silly pastime, doctor?" she asked, "there is not light enough to work, and I was trying to recall an old game of 'Patience.'"

"Aunt Janet's game?"

"You knew Aunt Janet?"

"I am Dick Wells. I do not believe Dr. Best has ever mentioned my name. But you are surely my cousin, Nellie French?"

"Yes! I am your cousin."

"And you will come home with me. My wife is as eager to find you as I have been, and Freddie needs many things I have not ventured to order here. Now, you can give him all he needs, and in a month more, when

warm weather comes, you can give him the pure country air of Riverslope, your inheritance."

"Mine! Is Aunt Janet dead?"

"Five years ago, and she left you Riverslope and one thousand two hundred pounds a year. She repented deeply sending you away, Nellie, and I may tell you now her match-making scheme could never have troubled you again, as my heart had gone out of my own keeping."

So, into the sorrowful troubled life there came prosperity and happiness. Dr. Wells's bright little wife gave his cousin a sister's greeting and affection, and Freddie recovered rapidly, with the added happiness of two cousins for playmates. The two families are like one, for Mrs. Hastings is in London all the winter at Dr. Wells's to have Freddie at school, while Sunnyslope is the home for all in the summer months. Often the cousins talk of Aunt Janet, and the game of "Patience" that led to such happy results!

## IN A SECRET DRAWER.

—O—

MRS. BLACK'S head was bent over her desk, and the pen in her hand raced over the snowy paper as though for dear life. On—on, the pile of manuscript at her side steadily increased, and the weary look upon the author's face grew deeper. Slowly the hands of the clock went round, and at last it struck the hour of ten. Brenda Black laid her pen down with a little sigh of relief and arose to her feet.

A plain little room away up in the third story of a house of the shabby-genteel pattern. In one corner a bed, upon which an elderly woman was lying, pale and wan—a hopeless invalid. In a cradle near by a child was sleeping—a pretty boy of three years.

Mrs. Black herself was a pale, sad-looking woman of thirty—a refined, sensitive-looking woman, with deep, dark eyes, brown hair and a mobile mouth. She had been left a widow, with one child, eighteen months before, and now struggled along, dependent almost solely upon her pen, not only for her own and her child's support, but also her invalid mother's, who was slowly wasting away with that fearful disease, consumption. The sick woman's mournful eyes followed her daughter's black-robed figure as she arose from the desk, pale and weary.

"Brenda, you have been sitting at that desk ever since nine this morning," she exclaimed, "except for the half-hour that you paused to get your dinner. Child, you are killing yourself! And Dr. Forsyth says that if you remain seated at your work for so many hours every day it will soon kill you. He says that you really must learn to stand when you are writing. A standing-desk is a real necessity to you."

Brenda sighed.

"I know it, mother. But how in the world can I afford such an expensive piece of furniture just now? The one at which I sit was poor Dick's, and I have prized it for his sake. When I get the money for my story we will have to pay the rent and lay in a supply of coal and provisions, and you really must have something nice and nourishing to eat, and some good wine, and—"

"And you must have a winter cloak, Brenda. It is a shame for you to be seen in that old Astrachan of yours. Never mind planning so exclusively for other people, my child. By the way, when I was sleeping just now I dreamed a very strange dream. I dreamed of Paul Vane. You remember Paul, don't you? Look out, dear, you will tip the inkstand over! Well, I dreamed that I saw him. He was handsome as ever, and in my dream he was not married."

Mrs. Black smiled.

"Dreams are unreliable," mother mine," she quoted, lightly. "For Paul was married

long ago. Dick told me so. Strange how he has vanished out of our lives. I have not met him since I was married."

Her face had grown quite pale and thoughtful. She was thinking of handsome Paul Vane, who had once been almost a lover and who had married some one else—how well Brenda remembered the day when first she heard it!—and then—then she had become the wife of Richard Black, whose widow she now was. And sitting before the fire she fell into a bitter-sweet reverie—bitter, for it was full of sad memories of Paul Vane and his strange conduct towards her; sweet, because even after the lapse of all these years there was a sad sweetness in thinking of the man to whom she had unconsciously given more of her heart than she had ever realised. She had married Richard Black, not comprehending that he was not the sort of man calculated to make her happy; but she did not regret it now as she looked back upon the past.

"I did my duty at least," she said, softly. And just then, to interrupt her reverie—weary, overworked Brenda had little time to indulge in such—there came a rap at the door of the room. Only a child from one of the neighbouring rooms who had brought the evening paper. She took it, and when the door had closed behind the little one she sat down once more to read aloud the evening news to her mother. In a column of miscellaneous advertisements she read this:—

"FOR SALE.—A standing desk. Price £1. Apply No. 70, Clare-street."

Brenda uttered an exclamation.

"Just what I have wanted so long!" she exclaimed; "and, mother, it is so cheap! Surely I can afford to purchase it?"

"Indeed you must secure it, Brenda," her mother cried, eagerly, "for that stooping position at your desk will induce consumption, Dr. Forsyth says, and you suffer so much from weak lungs."

Brenda arose, and began to prepare for the street.

"I will deliver my story at the office," she observed, "and go and secure the desk before I am too late."

Two hours later Mrs. Black returned to her room. The desk which she had purchased had been duly delivered and stood beside the window in the best light.

She lighted the lamp and examined her new acquisition with the satisfaction of a child.

"See, mother, how convenient! And here—"

She touched a portion of the ornamental woodwork as she spoke, and to her surprise it moved slightly, and she saw before her a secret compartment—a tiny drawer—and in that drawer a folded paper—a letter. Brenda drew it forth in wondering surprise.

She sunk into a seat with a cry of pain as her eyes fell upon her dead husband's handwriting upon the envelope.

"Paul Vane, Esq."

There it was as plain as day. Quite involuntarily Brenda drew the letter from its envelope and glanced it over hastily. Yes, it was from Richard Black to Paul Vane, and it was written a few months before their marriage. And in that letter Black had told Paul Vane that he was engaged to Brenda, and expected to make her his wife in a short time.

"You have confessed to me that you love her, Paul"—so ran the letter—"and to save you from certain sorrow I write this to you. I would spare you the pain of a refusal."

Had Paul asked her to become his wife would he have been subjected to "the pain of a refusal?" The hot blood crimsoned Brenda's cheeks at the thought. As she sat there with the letter in her hand a rap at the door aroused her, and a moment later a tall, dark, handsome man was standing before her, holding her hands in his, while he told her how glad he was to find her, for he had sought for her everywhere. The address which she had left when she purchased the desk had set him on the right track. For the desk, together

with other contents of his office, had been sent to an auction-room that the office might be refitted in more modern style. And Paul Vane was not married. That had been a fabrication of Richard Black's, who had won his wife with those false pretences. But all was explained now, and Brenda and Paul were made happy before it was too late. But it was quite a romance, was it not? And all to be set right through the medium of an old desk!

### FACETIÆ.

BECAUSE a man has a silvery laugh it does not follow that he has a rich voice.

If you were to take the conceit out of some people the remains would defy identification.

"Do you want your audience attentive?" said Dr. Emmons; "then give them something to attend to."

BIGGS: "I believe those people at the laundry steal my collars and cuffs." Boggs: "Steel 'em? They iron mine."

THE experience of many a life: "What a fool I've been!" The experience of many a wife: "What a fool I've got!"

WHY is an elephant like a man going to a country house on a visit? He always takes a trunk with him.

AMT: "How becoming that garland is to Miss Autumn!" Effie (jealously): "Yes; ivy always does look well on ruins."

MAID: "Mr. Small couldn't call to-night, and he sends his regrets and this little present," Miss Little: "Thanks for both."

"I'll bet," said Chollie, "judging from the way those trousers shrink, the wool was shorn from an unusually thick lamb."

"THERE was a case of love at first sight." "Why didn't they marry?" "They changed their minds at second sight."

A HOR on the "light, fantastic toe" may be pleasant, but not when you hop on the fantastic toe of your neighbour.

IT is a little singular that the woman your wife particularly dislikes is the woman you are most likely to fall in love with.

IT was Mrs. Parvett who boasted at dinner that she had "the best cremation batten." The poor soul meant "creamery."

FATHER: "If you expect to succeed in public life, my son, you must have push." Son: "I've got a pull, dad, and that's better than a push."

"FINE boy of yours, Smith!" "Yes, slow and sure." "He looks it." "Yes, slow to learn, sure to forget."

THERE is no difference between a dead miner and a live one, for in either case his dream of life is ore.

TEACHER: "In the sentence, 'The sick boy loves his medicine,' what part of speech is love?" Johnny: "It's a lie, mum!"

FIRST MATRON: "What safeguard against burglars have you in your house?" Second Matron: "All our things are imitation."

"WHAT is the use of a wooden coffin?" said an Irishman to his friend. "Sure, it will decay very soon. Bedad, I'll have an iron one, and it will last me all my life."

TEACHER: "To what circumstance is Columbus indebted for his fame?" Tommy: "To the circumstance that America was not already discovered."

"PRISONER, you were caught in the act of thrusting your hands in this lady's pocket." "It was only to put in the address card of my place of business."

"BRIDGET, I cannot allow you to receive your lover in the kitchen any longer." "It's very kind of you, ma'am, but he is almost too bashful to come into the parlour."

"WHAT the deuce do you take me for, sir?" "I took you for a gentleman." "And I, sir, took you for a cad." "Well, well, perhaps, we were both wrong." "I know I was." (Shake hands.)

BORDINS: "What makes old Bullion, the millionaire, dress so shabbily?" Robbins: "Pride of station." "How's that?" "He's afraid of being mistaken for a clerk."

HE: "And you say we are too poor to marry. Would you marry me if you were rich?" SHE: "No; but I would marry you if you were rich."

"HELLO, Bill, I hear ye're on strike." "So I am, I struck for fewer hours." "Did you succeed?" "Indeed I did. I'm not working at all now."

MR. TANGLE: "Does Tommy seem to find the path of learning a thorny and difficult one?" MRS. TANGLE: "No; I think he finds it a well-beaten road."

PHRACHEN (to three-year-old scholar): "Lulu, what do you go to Sunday school for?" Little Lulu (with finger in her mouth): "To see Dickie Johnson."

"WHAT was your objection to my predecessor, King Totem?" asked the missionary. "He was a person of very bad taste," returned the cannibal, making a wry face.

"SIR," said the culprit, "I committed this theft under advice of my doctor." "What! he hypnotised you?" "No sir. But he told me to take something before I went to bed."

HE: "One kiss is worth a hundred letters." SHE: "Oh, you're very sentimental." HE: "Oh, no. The kiss, you know, can't be introduced in a breach of promise suit."

"WHAT have you to say for yourself, sir?" demanded the Judge. "Nothin', yer Honour," returned the prisoner, coolly; "my lawyer is paid ter do the talkin'."

HE: "I hear you attend the Oratorio Society's performances. Were you present at the 'Creation'?" SHE (indignantly): "I suppose you will next want to know if I sailed in Noah's ark."

JONES: "Why don't you speak to Robinson now?" BROWN: "Because he was engaged to my wife before I married her. I don't want to have any dealings with a man who is sharper than I am."

DAY: "Has old Timeclock forgiven you for eloping with his daughter?" WEEKS: "Forgiven me? I haven't asked him since I discovered he ordered the hack in which we ran away."

MRS. CAUDLE: "I know I'm cross at times, John, but if I had my life to live over again I would marry you just the same." MR. CAUDLE: "I have my doubt, about it, my dear."

VISITOR: "My! what a splendid library. Have you read all those books?" HOSTESS: "No, but I should like to very much." VISITOR: "Well, why don't you?" HOSTESS: "I am afraid of soiling the bindings."

A LADY of charitable disposition asked a tramp if she could not assist him by mending his clothes. "Yes, madam," he replied. "I have a button, and if you would sew a shirt on to it you would greatly oblige me."

JEALOUSY.—Ethel: "I think I ought to tell you, Edith, that I met your fiancé in a dark hallway last night and he kissed me." Edith: "Indeed! the hallway must have been very dark."

"YOU are the light of my life," she said to him as she told him good-night at the front door. "Put out that light," growled her father at the head of the stairs, and the front door slammed.

"DID your mother say nothing else when she sent you to bring back the tub?" "Oh, yes; she said if you offered me a bit of pie not to refuse it, for, mercy knows, you don't kill anybody with kindness."

FIRST ENLIGHTENED VOTER: "I just heard that you sold your vote for £2 at the last election. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" SECOND ENLIGHTENED VOTER: "Well, that's all I could get."

EDITH: "Does it pay to advertise in my paper? Well, I should say it does. Look at Smith the grocer, for instance. He advertised for a boy last week, and the very next day Mrs. Smith had twin—both boys."

"LET us see, a cynic is a man who is tired of the world, is he not?" the young language student asked. "No, no, my child," replied the knowing tutor. "A cynic is a man of whom the world is tired."

WALKER: "Good gracious, Wentman, how you have changed—only a ghost of your former self. What have you been doing?" Wentman: "Following out the 'health hints' in the newspapers."

SCENE, Dublin. Time, midnight. English Gentleman (on a car): "You're the first driver I have seen sober at this hour since I've been in Ireland." Jarvey (apologetically): "Well, your honour, I won't be so ten minutes after I've set you down." Fact.

HE (doubtfully): "There's a—little freckle on your cheek, don't you know. I—I have heard that freckles can be removed by kissing." SHE: "Oh, that is a fraud. Consin Tom and I have been experimenting on that all summer."

DR. CAUTHERY (to rich Brighton widow): "Madame, I have examined your throat, I shall have to touch two or three of the affected spots with nitrate of silver." B. W.: "Oh, doctor, please don't do that. Use nitrate of gold—the expense is immaterial!"

A REFRACTORY Irishman in Walton Gaol, named Dennis McGinnis, refused to work. The warden said to him, "McGinnis, you go to work, or to the pump." "Niver," replied the Irishman. A second time the warden ordered McGinnis to work, but he refused to budge an inch. "Now, for the last time, McGinnis," exclaimed the warden, "you go to work or to the pump." "Niver, sir," said McGinnis, straightening up the full dignity of a man, "Bedad, sir, I'll leave the gaol first."

A STRANGER once walked into a Wiltshire County Court, and spent some time watching the proceedings. By-and-by a man was brought up for contempt of court and fined; whereupon the stranger rose and said: "How much was the fine?" "Five pounds," replied the clerk. "Well," said the stranger, laying down the money, "if that's all, I'd like to join in. I've had a few hours' experience of this court, and no one can feel a greater contempt for it than I do, and I am willing to pay for it."

GOOD old Uncle Henry and four-year-old Tom, his nephew, were in conference. Asked how he put in his time the small boy began with breakfast, hurried over playtime to dinner, then through more play to supper and then paused in doubt. "Well, Tom, what comes after supper?" asked his uncle. The boy's big eyes looked fixedly into space, but his lips never moved. "Surely something comes after supper?" the elder repeated. "Y-e-s," said Tom with a reluctant effort. "Well, what is it?" "I get whipped mostly."

SAMBO, the typical Sambo, joined the church, and the shepherd of his soul thought best to look after him. "Have you stolen any chickens, Sambo, since you met with a change of heart?" said the shepherd one day. "No massa; oh, no. I hasn't stole no chick'ns tall." "Any turkeys?" persisted the pastor. "Oh, no, massa! I hasn't took nary a turkey." "Well, Sambo, I am glad to hear it—very glad. Watch and pray!" And the good man went on. "Golly!" chuckled Sambo, peeping inside his coat, "if he'd a sed ducks he'd a hed me."

A MORNING CALL.—Little Hostess (daughter of an author): "Do you see all these books? Those are my papa's books." Little Boy: "Did he buy 'em?" "No; he made 'em." "Did he make the paper?" "Of course not." "They're nice covers. Did he make the covers?" "No." "These is awful nice pictures. Did he make them?" "No. He wrote the books, you know." "Well, it's nice type anyhow. Where's his type-writer?" "They ain't written by a type-writer. They is printed, same as all books, but papa did the writing." "Oh! Only the writing."



## SOCIETY.

A WOMAN'S chances of marriage in her sixtieth year are only a quarter per cent.

It is said that to drink sweet milk after eating onions will purify the breath so that no odour will remain.

LORD SALISBURY is wonderfully well, and looking better than he has done for years. Lady Salisbury has entirely recovered from the attack of bronchitis, but still has to be careful.

ANOTHER silver wedding gift, this time to Princess Mary, is just announced, with a goodly array of duchesses, &c., for a committee, and they are already beginning to organise well.

THE Empress Frederick is a delightful talker, and nothing pleases her better than to have clever people to talk to—especially people with opinions of their own, and by their position able to express them.

Just at this moment it is interesting to know that the German Emperor has a distaste of card-playing—a taste, or distaste, that is distinctly hereditary. The Emperor Frederick rarely played, and the old Emperor Wilhelm more rarely still.

JEWELLERY, which has been so lavishly applied to dress decoration, is now in favour for photograph-screens and frames, book covers of antique style, the tea-caddy, wall-pocket fan, and anything else which will stand embellishment with mock rubies, emeralds, sapphires. Eastern gorgeousness is nowhere in comparison.

THE Duchess of Albany is to be provided with a stepmother of thirty-three, just three years older than Her Royal Highness. The bride-elect is first cousin to the Princess of Wales. She will be stepmother, of course, to the Queen-mother, and step-grandmother to the Queen of the Netherlands.

THE Duchess of Edinburgh, who has been residing at Coburg since her departure from England, will stay in Russia until the end of May, and her time is to be divided between the Palace where the Emperor may happen to be living and Moscow, where she is to be the guest of the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess Serge.

THE home of Olive Schreiner, the author of "Dreams" and the "Story of an African Farm," is at Matjiesfontein, Cape Colony. The place consists of a farm, a hotel, a mill, a warehouse, a station, and a few mean houses, and lies in the very heart of the wilderness, surrounded by such scenery as Miss Schreiner has often described in her books—level wastes of grey sand and ragged ridges of rock.

THE Czar's favourite son, the Grand Duke George, whose constitution—never over robust—has been much weakened by dissipation, is now in a confirmed consumption. So rapidly has the malady increased that the Czarina is making a journey to Greece in order that she may meet her son, who sails for Algiers shortly, at Corfu. The doctors insist on the patient's speedy return to Algiers, at which spot it is hoped the fatal results of the disease may be stayed off for a time.

A NEW YORK dressmaker has hit upon a novel method of advertisement. She hired a theatre, decked it profusely with palms and flowers, engaging a good orchestra, and sent out invitations for an afternoon reception. When the place was full she came on to the stage in a glorious teagown, and announced to the audience the price. Then she reappeared, mounted on a real horse, in a specially perfect riding habit. Having dismounted, she discoursed, while feeding the horse with sugar, on the price of riding gear. An afternoon walking dress was the next change of raiment, then a visiting robe, &c. Last of all, she appeared in a ravishing ball costume, leading a little girl by the hand, and this brought down the house with applause.

## STATISTICS.

THE average amount of sickness in human life is nine days per annum.

EIGHTY thousand telegrams are despatched from London offices daily.

£8,000,000 are computed to change hands in England yearly through betting on races.

WHEN reading a man usually gets through 400 words a minute.

CANCER is three times as prevalent as it was forty years ago.

THE chances against one person holding seven trumps in one hand at whist are 160 to 1.

## GEMS.

ONE of the illusions is that the present hour is not the critical, decisive hour. Write it on your heart that every day is the best day of the year.

GOOD manners is the art of making those people easy with whom we converse. Whoever makes the fewest persons weary is the best-bred man in company.

CONSCIENCE is doubtless sufficient to conduct the coldest character into the road to virtue; but enthusiasm is to conscience what honour is to duty; there is in us a superfluity of soul, which it is sweet to consecrate to the beautiful when the good has been accomplished.

WHEN we become exclusively absorbed in one pursuit, however legitimate it may be in itself, it draws the mind and interests away from all other things, and causes us to neglect them, though some of them may be as distinctly defined duties as itself.

THE man to be deputed at dinners and receptions is the man who talks brilliantly for a few minutes, and then gives his listener an opportunity to say something—the man who has not only the faculty of shining in conversation himself, but also of making others shine with whom he converses.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BREAD WITH BAKING POWDER.—One pound flour, half teaspoonful salt, one large teaspoonful baking powder, about one breakfast cupful of milk and water. Put the dry things in the flour and just wet it with milk and water. Form it into a loaf, and bake very quickly at once.

SPONGE DROPS.—Beat to a froth three eggs and one teaspoon of sugar. Stir into this one heaping coffee cup of flour into which one teaspoonful of cream tartar and one-half teaspoonful of soda are thoroughly sifted. Flavour with lemon. Butter tin sheets with butter with the salt washed out, bake in a quick oven, and watch closely, as they will burn very easily.

ALMOND TABLET may be prepared like toffy, leaving out the butter and putting in the juice of half a lemon instead of flavouring, and cream of tartar. When ready sprinkle a quarter of a pound of almonds, skinned and dried and split, over the buttered dish, and pour the sugar mixture on the top of them; or the almonds may be mixed in the pan with the mixture and all poured out together.

WHIPPED CREAM.—Put the cream in a bowl, and with a whisk whip it smartly. It is better to whip at one side of the basin and the froth will collect at the other. Common cream whips quite well. If cream is to be whipped for the top of fruit or a trifle it is better to add a little sugar, and lift off the froth as it gathers on to the top of a sieve with a plate under it. Whatever milk drops on the plate can be put back in the basin and whipped again.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

VERY few people actually die from old age. As a rule women have better eyesight than men.

THE largest perfect diamond in existence is worth £250,000.

LONDON has experienced thirty-eight consecutive days of dense fog this season.

A MACHINE for making shoe-strings out of paper is a recent Philadelphia invention.

OVER twenty boys under eighteen years of age have won the Victoria Cross.

THERE is a claim in the Patent-office for a patent on the Lord's prayer, the specification being that the repetition of the same, "rapid and in a loud tone of voice," will cure stammering.

IN these days of so many alleged cures for consumption oysters are commended, and are given to consumptive patients because they contain iodine. The treatment is quite common in the South.

THE passion-flower derives its name from an idea that all the instruments of Christ's passion are represented—viz., the five wounds, the collar or pillar of scourging, besides the three nails, the crown of thorns, &c. Most of the passion flowers are natives of the hottest parts of America.

METEOROLOGISTS have found that there is only 5deg. average variation of temperature at the top of the Eiffel Tower, while the average in Paris below is 10deg., and that recently there was a warm breeze for three days at the top of the tower, while there was cold weather below and severe frosts.

A FEW years ago the number of valentines posted on Valentine's Day was 3,000,000; this year it was only 300,000, and of these the greater number were conceived in a humorous vein. The old and purely sentimental valentine, over the composition of which we used to spend many sleepless nights, is extinct. The strong spirit of the times has killed it.

BEDS are quite an innovation in Russia, and many well-to-do houses are still unprovided with them. Peasants sleep on the tops of their ovens; middle-class people and servants roll themselves up in sheepskins and lie down near stoves; soldiers rest upon wooden cots without bedding; and it is only within the last few years that students in State schools have been allowed beds.

A FRENCH doctor wants to introduce his patent process for preserving the remains of the dead. It is not embalming them, nor yet mummifying them; though the bodies must be embalmed before the doctor's new process takes hold of them. The new idea is to electroplate the whole body, and thus preserve to posterity the noble lineaments of those whose estates cut up sufficiently well to allow the expense.

EXPERIMENTS in "hair grafting," that is to say, in removing hair from one head and planting it on another. This is really a delightful idea for the owners of imperfectly-covered scalps, who will in future be able to supply their hirsute deficiencies from the heads of those gifted with superabundant locks. The only difficulty that will arise will be that entailed in finding the exact "shade" on a friend's head to match one's own insufficient supply.

AN old soldier gives the following advice regarding cold feet: "At one time while I was stamping upon the ground, in the effort to warm my extremities, a comrade in the same regiment said to me, 'If your feet are cold try this.' He raised his foot from the ground, and struck some light blows with his hand on the upper part of his leg, just above the knee. I did the same with both legs, and instantaneously felt a flow of warm blood coursing downward, and the feet soon became comfortably warm."

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**DAISY.**—The forglove has nothing to do with foxes, but the name is a corruption of folk's glove or fairies' glove; or else it comes from *foeco*, red.

**BROKEN HEARTED.**—A soldier may be made liable to contribute to the support of an illegitimate child affiliated upon him.

**TYNE.**—The knot, or nautical mile, is 6,086.7 feet. Eighteen knots is therefore equivalent to rather more than 22½ miles.

**DOMESTICATED.**—Shabby leather chair seats, valises and bags can be brightened by rubbing them with the well-beaten white of an egg.

**R. A. D.**—There is no power to vacate the seat of a member of the House of Commons who persistently absents himself from his Parliamentary duties.

**CHRISTINA.**—Burial fees in parish churchyards are not fixed on one scale. We have no doubt the charge made in the case you describe was according to the rule in the parish.

**GODFREY.**—A Post Office letter-carrier cannot be legally employed to deliver any letters or documents but those which have gone through the post and are properly stamped.

**HUMPHRY.**—If the house was taken for a specific term of twelve months, the tenancy ends then, without notice. Otherwise six months' notice, ending with the date of entry, must be given.

**MADRELIN.**—The garnet gets its name from the pomegranate, on account of the red colour resembling the seeds of that fruit. The garnets most esteemed in jewellery come from Ceylon and Greenland.

**FLORA.**—The first railway passenger killed by an accident was Mr. W. Huskisson, M.P., who lost his life at the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, on September 15, 1830.

**SYNTAX.**—There is no fixed rule as to the arrangement of a sentence, so long as it is correct. Taste is the arbiter, and it varies from the style of Dr. Johnson to that of Carlyle.

**"BONA FIDE."**—To have travelled seven miles does not in itself legally constitute a "bona-fide traveller." The person must have travelled, at least, three miles from the place where he slept the preceding night.

**IMPECUNIOSITY.**—We have stated times without number that the moment a money-lender asks a fee for inquiries he should be dropped. He means to take the money, pretend to inquire, then say the loan cannot be given.

**BOOKWORM.**—The age of the book gives it no special value. There is one edition of which only a very few copies are known to exist, and they are valuable on account of their scarcity. As yours is not dated, it follows that it is not one of the rare kind.

**LAW.**—The marriage of the testator makes void his previous will. If he dies without making a new will the widow would take her proportion of the personalty, and the remainder and the real property would go to the daughter.

**PARTY DICK.**—Never let a bird-cage hang in a room where the gas is slight, unless it is exceedingly well ventilated. The air near the ceiling is always the most impure at night. Set the cage on the ground, and you will find the bird's health improve.

**MUSIC.**—The term "classical" as applied to music is used to describe compositions of the first rank and of orthodox or standard forms, like the sonata, the symphony, the oratorio. Wagner's music generally does not come under this head.

**AN ARDENT WORKER.**—Mosaic wool-work is figured work wrought in rugs and imitations of Wilton carpets, or other articles on which figures or pictures are produced, by different coloured woollen yarns in the manner of mosaics.

**J. S.**—The name of canon, an ecclesiastical dignity, was originally applied to all the clergy in the Church of England, but was afterwards confined to those who were connected with the cathedral church, or to specially privileged churches.

**AN ADMIRER OF "THE LONDON READER."**—The receipt is not legal evidence of payment without the stamp, which it is the duty of the receiver of the money to provide, and he incurs a penalty if he fails to do so; but no prosecution takes place except it becomes apparent that he deliberately desires to cheat the Revenue.

**YOUNG HOUSEKEEPER.**—The easiest way to frost glass is to make a saturated solution of Epsom salt—that is, to put salts into water until some of it lies undissolved at the bottom, then dab that over the glass, and let it dry; another plan is to take thick white paint and "dob" it in with the end of a stiff paint brush.

**WARRNER.**—The Mediterranean is comparatively shallow. A drying up of 660 feet would leave three different seas, and Africa would be joined with Italy. The British Channel is more like a pond, which accounts for its choppy waves. It has been found difficult to get the correct soundings of the Atlantic.

**INDIGNANT ONE.**—You are late in the day. The swindle has been exposed over and over again, and we understand action is now or will soon be taken against the people. Meantime, write, asking the meaning of the note, reminding them that 20s. was sent as desired, and that they have cashed the order. If the picture is not at once forthcoming you will communicate the facts to the police.

**MOLLY'S SWEETHEART.**—The complete cost of a marriage by license before a registrar, including the certificate, is £2 17s. 1d. Only one day's notice is necessary, but one of the contracting parties must have been residing in the district for fifteen days immediately preceding the application for the license.

**JACQUE.**—For a long time—from the burning of Whitehall in the reign of William III. till the removal of Queen Victoria's personal establishment to Buckingham Palace—St. James Palace was the only royal mansion of the sovereigns of England. It consequently was the centre of the Court, and the English Court became known as "the Court of St. James."

**AMBITION.**—An English peer of the realm cannot hold a seat in the House of Commons. But numerous persons in Great Britain are styled lords who are not peers, and, therefore, not entitled to seats in the House of Lords. The eldest sons of dukes, marquises and earls are called lords by courtesy, and there are certain Irish and Scotch peers who are not peers of the realm.

**SCRIPTIC.**—Here is a simple test for milk: A well-polished knitting-needle is dipped into a deep vessel of milk and immediately withdrawn in an upright position. If the sample is pure, some of the fluid will cling to the needle; but if water has been added to the milk, even in small proportions, the fluid will not adhere to the needle.

## REGRET.

There are thoughts of disappointments

Over which we pine and fret;  
There are memories of sorrows  
That we fain would not forget;  
But of all our grim reflections,  
And our bitter recollections,  
Our most painful retrospections  
Are our harvests of regret.

Have we roused a brother's anger?  
Have we caused another pain?  
Or when Fortune smiled upon us,  
Did we treat her with disdain?  
Have our aims been misdirected—  
Opportunities neglected—  
Are we worthily respected?  
Have we lived or loved in vain?

Our regrets are largely owing  
To good deeds left undone,  
And to misdeeds promptly finished  
That were better ne'er begun;  
They are barren and uncheerful,  
They are many, they are fearful—  
Or perchance but few are fearful;  
But no living man hath none.

Every action leaves its impress,  
Be it bold or crumpled;  
What, though God forgives an error,  
Does that cancel its effect?  
Till our wronged we have requited,  
We stand gully, self-indicted;  
The mistakes we can't see righted,  
God's forgiveness can't correct.

The past errors we may never  
In eternity forget;  
Their grave results, however,  
We may partially offset.  
Let us strive to make corrections,  
For, of all our grim reflections,  
Our most painful retrospections  
Are our harvests of regret!

M. H. V.

**F. P.**—War against Prussia was declared on 15th July, 1870. The French bombarded and captured Saarbrück on 2nd August, but the first great battle was fought at Woerth on 6th August, when the French were defeated with great loss. Negotiations for peace were begun on February 21, 1871, and the treaty of peace was signed at Frankfurt on 10th May.

**THE MERRYMAN.**—The Yeomen of the Guard is a bodyguard to the sovereign, first instituted by Henry VII., and the oldest corps in Her Majesty's service. Its headquarters are at the Tower; and the men, who wear the picturesque dress of Tudor days, are better known as "Boobsters" (Buffeters). The captain is always a peer and Privy Councillor.

**TOOTS.**—When a couple engage themselves to one another, the day of marriage is seldom, if ever, fixed upon. Should a lover, immediately after the conclusive "yes," propose to fix the day, he would be looked upon as indecorously precipitate. The offer of marriage and its acceptance constitute an engagement, without the fixing of a day for the ceremony to be performed.

**EMIGRANT.**—By writing to the Agent-General for Queensland, 1, Victoria-street, London, S.W., you will receive full information regarding the conditions on which gardeners are assisted out to the colony, but we cannot advise you to go there just now, there being a glut of labour, and wages in consequence very much reduced. Recent reports show men to be working for a bare subsistence.

**EMIGRANT.**—To those about to emigrate, there is no advice equal to the advice of those who have "been there," and we presume it is to some friend who has experience of the States that you allude when you say you are "well advised" to go out. For our part, we should say that no one in the soft goods line should think of emigrating except he carries letters of introduction which will serve to put him in the way of an engagement, or his friends who will take care of him until he finds a situation.

**BAICA.**—When Peter the Great sent an exploring expedition to ascertain whether Asia and America were united by land, he selected as leader of the expedition Captain Ivan Ivanovich Bering. All the Russian and Danish records agree as to the spelling of the family name; both in Danish and in Russian it is "Bering." The autograph was always written "Bering." Consequently, the correct spelling of the straits is "Bering."

**A SUFFERER.**—1. Cinchona or Peruvian bark (with its alkaloid quinine), is a remedy almost universally applied in the treatment of malarial fevers; but there is said to be no good evidence that the taking of quinine wards off the attack of malaria. 2. The extent of cinchona planting in Southern India, Ceylon, Jamaica, and elsewhere is the best measure of the value of quinine as a remedy, and more particularly as a remedy for ague.

**JANET.**—1. Lochinvar, pronounced as if spelled lok-in-var, the accent on the last syllable, is a lake of Scotland, the circuit of which is three miles. The castle of the Gordons, Knights of Lochinvar, was built on an island in the lake. 2. Loch Lomond, the largest Lake of Scotland, is pronounced as if spelled lo-ic-mond, the accent on the second syllable. 3. Ben Lomond is a mountain of Scotland, and is pronounced ben-lo-mond, the accent on the second syllable.

**A SOLDIER'S LASS.**—The Earl of Cardigan, upon an order alleged to have been given by Lord Lucan for the capture of certain Russian guns, led the charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava. The brigade was composed only of about six hundred horsemen, who cut their way through and back again. The survivors did not exceed one hundred and fifty. The first who fell was Captain Nolan, the officer who conveyed the disputed order from Lord Lucan.

**BEREAVED ONE.**—One year is the usual period for wearing mourning for a deceased member of one's own family, and at the expiration of that period some persons wear half-mourning for an indefinite length of time, according to their own individual feelings and tastes. If a person chooses to wear full mourning for two, or even five or more years, there would be nothing improper in it. Such a thing is not uncommonly done by widows and mothers whose affection for the deceased was very strong, and whose grief is deep and lasting.

**VICTOR.**—Joan of Arc (Jeanne D'Arc), known as La Pucelle and the "Maid of Orleans," was the fifth child of poor parents, whose family name, it is stated, was probably Darc. She began to believe herself the subject of supernatural visitations at the age of thirteen. The cottage in which she was born still stands, and the spot of her execution in Rouen is marked by a statue. Date of birth (in Lorraine), about 1411; date of death, May 31, 1431. After being burned at the stake her ashes were thrown into the Seine.

**A CONSTANT READER.**—Eau de Cologne is the French and a common trade name for Cologne water. Eau de Javelle is chlorine in solution with water, and is used for taking out fruit stains, etc., from linen. Eau de luce is a volatile preparation or kind of liquid soap, formed by mixing a tincture of oil of amber and balsam of Gilead, with a strong solution of ammonia. Eau de Paris is a substitute for Eau de Cologne; besides being a toilet perfume it is claimed to be a protection to woollens from moths. Eau de vie is a French name for brandy.

**A STUART PARTISAN.**—Coldstream is a town in Scotland. As said to other correspondents, adjoining the town is the celebrated ford of the Tweed, which was repeatedly crossed by the invading armies of both Scotland and England. A corps was raised there which was first known as Monk's regiment, but subsequently it was included, under the name of Coldstream Guards, in the brigade which Parliament allowed to Charles II. It retains this designation as a regiment in the Foot Guards or Household Brigade, and is one of the oldest corps in the British Army.

**E. P. R.**—To "Bowdlerise a book" is to remove all the naughty passages from it before publication, and the process takes its name from a reverend gentleman and English divine who years ago hit upon the happy (!) notion of purifying Shakespeare by removing from the text all passages which might offend prudish and delicate minds. To "Grangerise a book" is to extend it by extra-illustration—that is, by the insertion of prints, directly or indirectly illustrative of the text, and is so-called from James Granger, an Oxfordshire vicar, who wrote a history of England, which he called the "Biographical History," two volumes, quarto. The first edition was printed on one side of paper only, more readily to permit the insertion of prints by collectors.

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